

EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ASLAN ACADEMY TO EQUIP
PARENTS TO DISCIPLE THEIR CHILDREN

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To AnneMarie, Amy, and Caleb – For helping me understand what matters most.

Thank you.

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ABSTRACT

The *Aslan Academy* is a program designed by the C.S. Lewis Institute for helping parents disciple their children. This thesis-project evaluates the effectiveness of *Aslan Academy* with parents at Friends Community Church. It articulates the need for the program within its local setting. Then, it presents the biblical and theological foundations for discipleship in general and discipleship within the home specifically. A focus group of participating parents is convened to evaluate its effectiveness. The author discusses adjustments made and observes the overall impact of the project.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM AND ITS SETTING

Introduction

This first chapter's purpose is six-fold. Its first purpose is to present the issue being addressed. Second, it will examine the ministry setting in which the problem exists as viewed by the Friends Community Church (FCC) leadership team through the lens of the Church Health Assessment Tool (CHAT). Third, it will present the project-thesis with the question to be answered. The last three purposes of this chapter are to discuss the project assumptions, methodology, and parameters.

The Issue Addressed

FCC has substantial kids church and youth programs. Parents offer frequent positive comments concerning the instruction their children receive during the weekly meetings. However, many recognize that one meeting per week is insufficient to prepare their children to live a Christ-centered life. They understand the need to disciple their children at home but they feel unequipped and don't know where to start. FCC has no specific program in place to equip and coach parents to disciple their children. The lack of an effective program to equip parents to disciple their children is the issue this thesis-project addresses.

The Ministry Setting

The author is one of four pastors at FCC in Fairbanks, AK. He has been in this position since July 2012. Before that, he attended the church for about six months. During those six months, he observed the following: The church has a strong emphasis on evangelism through church services and regularly sponsored large events that are

successful in attracting people. The priorities are the Sunday worship services at 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. They are designed to attract people through professional contemporary music and practical messages. The environment stresses relationships with one another. The services are celebratory in nature, limited in depth and designed to win people. People are attracted to the church because they have real questions that need answered and hurts that need to be addressed. Sermons are designed to answer those questions and address the hurts. Christians are encouraged to invite their friends to the services where an invitation to accept Christ is offered frequently. Discipleship occurs through church attendance, women's group, men's group, Celebrate Recovery (CR), and other small groups. Periodic classes are offered on connecting, serving, growing, and sharing. Overall, intentional discipleship opportunities have been nearly non-existent. Dress is casual and a coffee shop is located in the foyer. Kids church and youth group are a high priority. Kids church is offered for pre-kindergarten through grade 5 during both of the Sunday morning worship services. Grades 6 through 8 meet during the late Sunday morning worship service. They also meet with the high school kids during a Wednesday evening youth group meeting.

When the author approached the lead pastor and, later, the FCC leadership, he articulated his passion for making disciples and equipping. They acknowledged their awareness of the need for discipleship within the congregation. They offered him the opportunity to join the leadership team and to help make the church a disciple-making church. He accepted.

Since starting as a member of the FCC leadership team, the author has focused on merging his experience with lessons learned from studying and reflecting on what he

leads two small groups. The first group is a couples group meeting in his home. There are three couples plus his wife and himself. They meet weekly for dinner and then study and pray together afterwards. The second group is a weekly men's group.

Second, he leads multiple seminars: (1) a seminar entitled "Discipleship and Evangelism," (2) a seminar entitled "Parenting and Discipleship in the Home," (3) a seminar for the FCC leadership entitled "A Biblical Theology of Evangelism, Discipleship, and Revival," (4) a seminar entitled "Practicing the Presence of God."

Third, he worked with the FCC leadership to clearly communicate the content and application of the Great Commission and to articulate it plainly as the mission of FCC. The implications of this are significant. Specifically, Michael Wilkins lists three: (1) The Christian life is equivalent to being a disciple of Christ. (2) The Great Commission applies to all believers. (3) The distinctions among disciples relate to function, not value.¹ Rick Warren says that communicating the purpose, or mission, of the church is the definitive responsibility of the leadership. He suggests that it can be done in a number of ways but that it should be done at least monthly. Some of his suggestions include: Teaching what scripture says about the church and its mission, use symbols to visually represent the mission, use slogans or pithy phrases as a reminder, tell stories or testimonies about how spiritual growth has been a factor in someone's life and present specific plans as to how the church plans to fulfill its mission.²

Fourth, as the author worked with the FCC leadership, they realized the importance to have an accurate representation of the health of the church. They agreed

¹ Michael Wilkins, *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 191-192.

² Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 112-114.

that, “Effective individual evangelism grows out of the context of a healthy, vibrant fellowship of believers.”³ To this end, they planned and conducted a congregation-wide church health assessment during the fall of 2014.

When the FCC leadership team searched for a tool that would help them to evaluate the health of FCC, they decided on CHAT published by Leadership Transformations Incorporated (LTI). LTI affirms that a healthy church is the best context for healthy discipleship. They explain that, “A healthy church is prayerful in all aspects of church life and ministry, reliant upon God’s power and the authority of his Word.”⁴ CHAT seeks to determine the health of a church by examining the following ten areas:

1. *God’s empowering presence.* The healthy church actively seeks the Holy Spirit’s direction and empowerment for its daily life and ministry. (Romans 8:16, “The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”)
2. *God-exalting worship.* The healthy church gathers regularly as the local expression of the body of Christ to worship God in ways that engage the heart, mind, soul, and strength of the people. (John 4:23, “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.”)
3. *Spiritual disciplines.* The healthy church provides training, models, and resources for members of all ages to develop their daily spiritual disciplines. (James 3:17, “But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.”)
4. *Learning and growing in community.* The healthy church encourages believers to grow in their walk with God and with one another in the context of a safe, affirming environment. (Romans 14:19, “Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.”)
5. *A commitment to loving and caring relationships.* The healthy church is intentional in its efforts to build loving, caring relationships within families, between members, and within the community it serves. (1 John 3:16, “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.”)
6. *Servant-leadership development.* The healthy church identifies and develops individuals whom God has called to become servant-leaders. (Ephesians 4:16,

³Joseph C. Aldrich, *Life-Style Evangelism: Crossing Traditional Boundaries to Reach the Unbelieving World* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Books, 1993, 1991), 18.

⁴ Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Disciple: Ten Traits of a Vital Christian* (Lexington, MA: Leadership Transformations, 2013), 14.

“From him [Christ] the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”)

7. *An outward focus.* The healthy church places high priority on communicating the truth of Jesus and demonstrating the love of Jesus to those outside the faith. (Luke 19:10, “For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.”)
8. *Wise administration and accountability.* The healthy church utilizes appropriate facilities, equipment, and systems to provide maximum support for the growth and development of its ministries. (Luke 16:11, “So if you have not been trustworthy in handling worldly wealth, who will trust you with true riches?”)
9. *Networking with the body of Christ.* The healthy church reaches out to others in the body of Christ for collaboration, resource sharing, learning opportunities, and united celebrations of worship. (John 17:23, “May they [the church] be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”)
10. *Stewardship and generosity.* The healthy church teaches its members that they are stewards of their God-given resources and challenges them to sacrificial generosity in sharing with others. (2 Corinthians 9:6, “Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.”)⁵

The congregation and leadership team of FCC completed the survey as separate groups during the period October 5-27, 2014. The responses of these two groups were tracked separately. The goal was to have at least 25% participation and FCC met that goal with a participation rate of exactly 25%. The anonymous online survey consisted of 72 questions created by LTI. FCC added 10 custom questions and 2 demographics profiles. The questions were multiple choice and Likert scale (1-5). Participants were given the opportunity to make open-ended comments at the end of each of the ten major sections.

It is significant to note that on October 26 the senior pastor resigned. He was the founding pastor and had established many long-term relationships. He was asked to resign by the governing board because of some questionable administrative practices and poor relations with his leadership team. Throughout the time of the survey, there was considerable speculation and rumors circulating, creating a noticeable amount of angst

⁵ Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Disciple*, 14-16.

and apprehension within the congregation and leadership team. This was reflected in the multitude of open-ended comments.

From figure 1, note that 30% of our congregation is single. This is a significant percentage and represents an opportunity for ministry. The leadership team suspects that much of that figure is attributed to the close proximity of FCC to Fort Wainwright and to the University of Alaska Fairbanks. Currently, there are no specific ministries targeted for singles.

Figure 1. Marital status

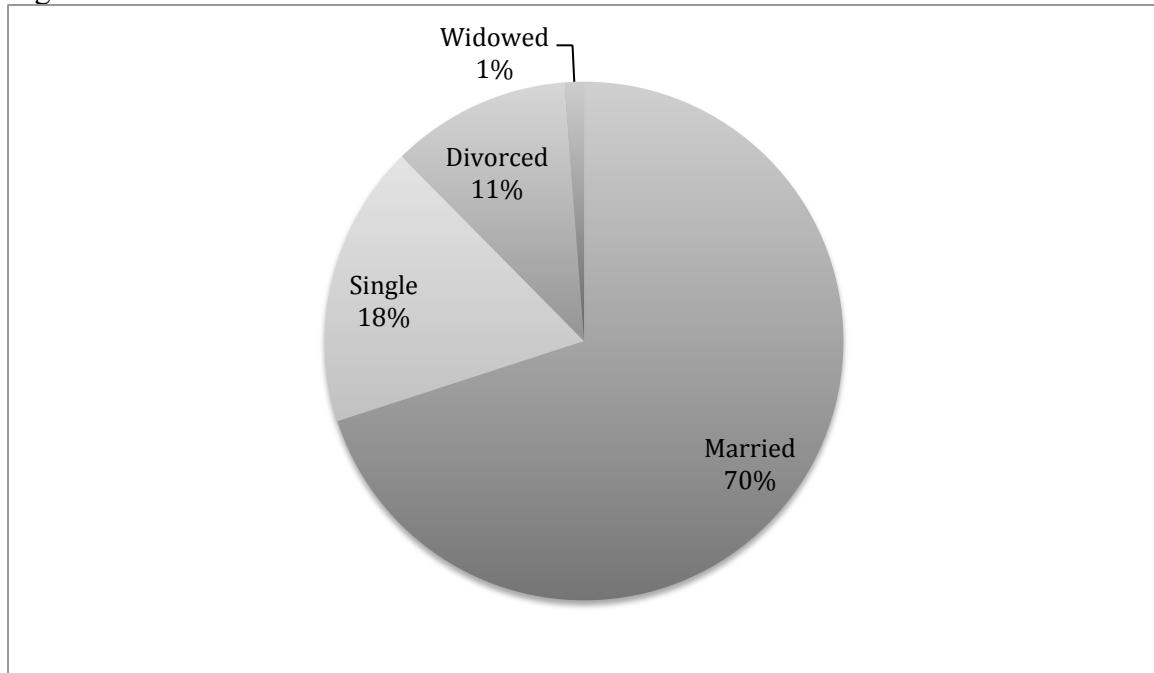


Figure 2 indicates that 18% of the congregation has been at FCC for less than one year. However, growth was less than 18% during the last year. This indicates that a considerable population that comes to FCC does not stay. This is due in part to the large military contingent.

Also significant from the same figure is that only 10% have been with FCC for more than 10 years. This is a relatively small percentage. It indicates that there is little institutional memory about how FCC came to be and why we exist as a church. For the 90% that have been here for less than 10 years, it is imperative that there be frequent communication of the vision and mission of the church.

Figure 2. Years at FCC

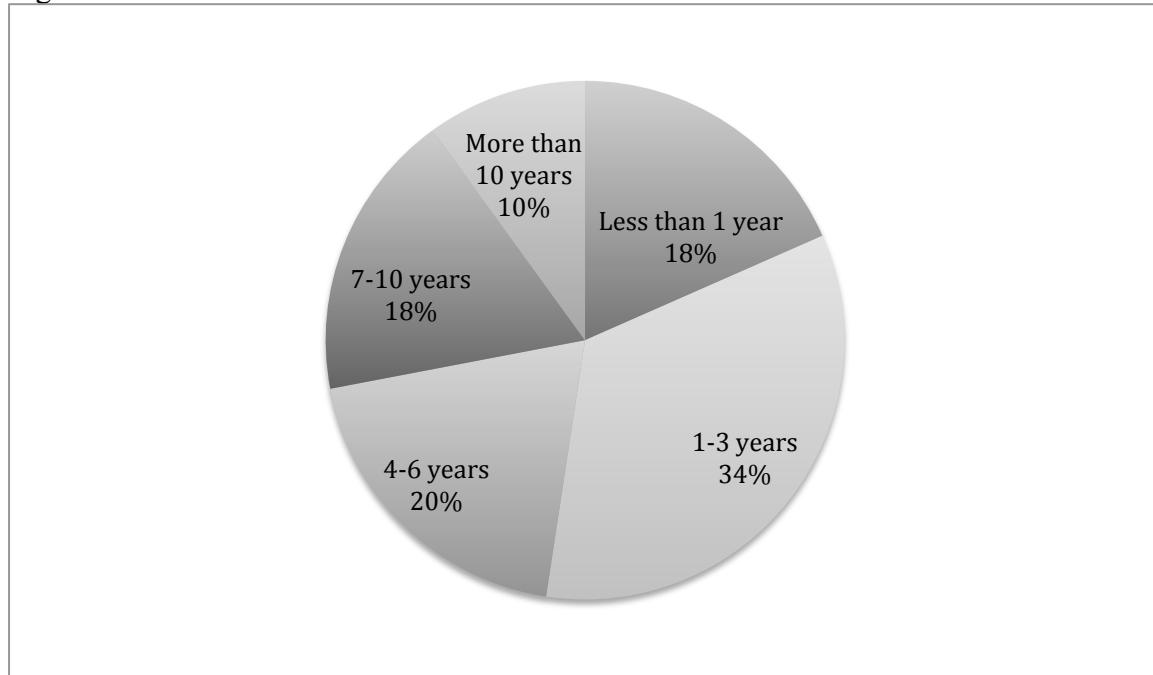
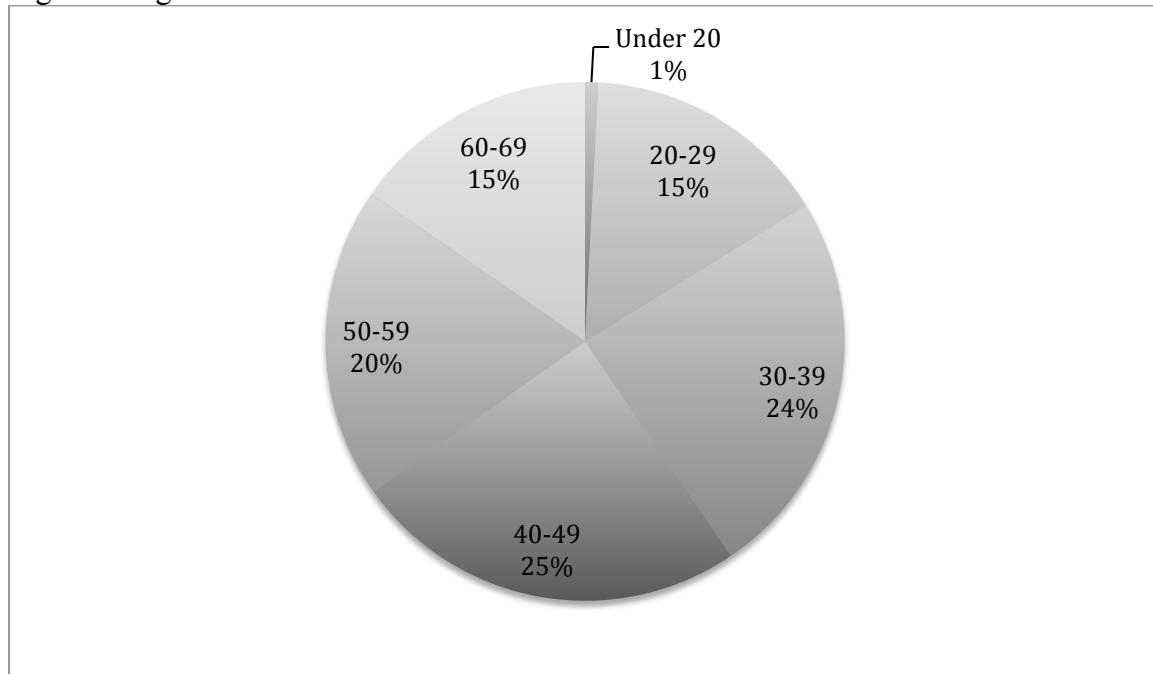


Figure 3 notes that almost one-third of the people are in the 50-69 years range. They are quickly approaching retirement and represent a ministry opportunity to help them plan for retirement and equip them for ministry.

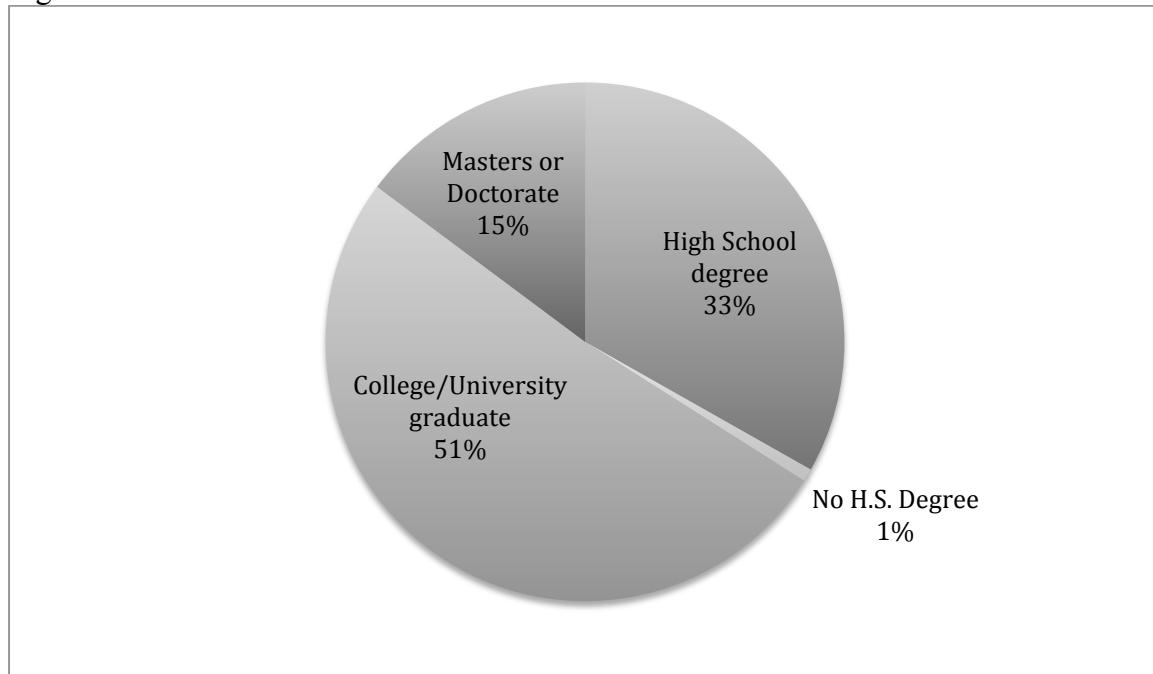
Conversely, approximately two-thirds are less than 50 years old. This group tends to have little discretionary time so we need to be creative in offering ways to get them involved. This is also the group that includes most of the parents of the younger children.

Figure 3. Age



Two-thirds of the congregation have college degrees according to figure 4. The leadership team, however, is suspicious of this figure. It is surprisingly high. They tend to think that it reflects the tendency for the more educated to be more likely to complete the survey. However, the percentage is still high and they need to consider appropriate ways to involve this demographic.

Figure 4. Education



The greatest strengths of FCC for both the congregation and the leadership team are summarized in table 1. By a significant margin, the congregation chose God-exalting worship as the greatest strength. God's empowering presence was second, followed by a commitment to loving & caring relationships. Similarly, the leadership team chose God-exalting worship as the greatest strength by a significant margin. While the leadership team selections for second and third are less representative of the congregation's selections, it is noteworthy that God-exalting worship, God's empowering presence and a commitment to loving and caring relationships are in the top three of both groups.

Table 1. Greatest strengths of FCC

Congregation	Leadership
77% God-exalting worship	83% God-exalting worship
55% God's empowering presence	42% A commitment to loving & caring relationships; an outward focus
36% A commitment to loving & caring relationships	33% God's empowering presence; learning & growing in community

Table 2 shows that the congregation's top three areas in need of improvement are networking with the body of Christ, servant-leadership development and spiritual disciplines. The leadership includes the same items in their top three while mentioning wise administration & accountability, God's empowering presence and stewardship & generosity. It is significant that networking with the body of Christ, servant-leadership development and spiritual disciplines are present in the both the congregation and the leadership team responses.

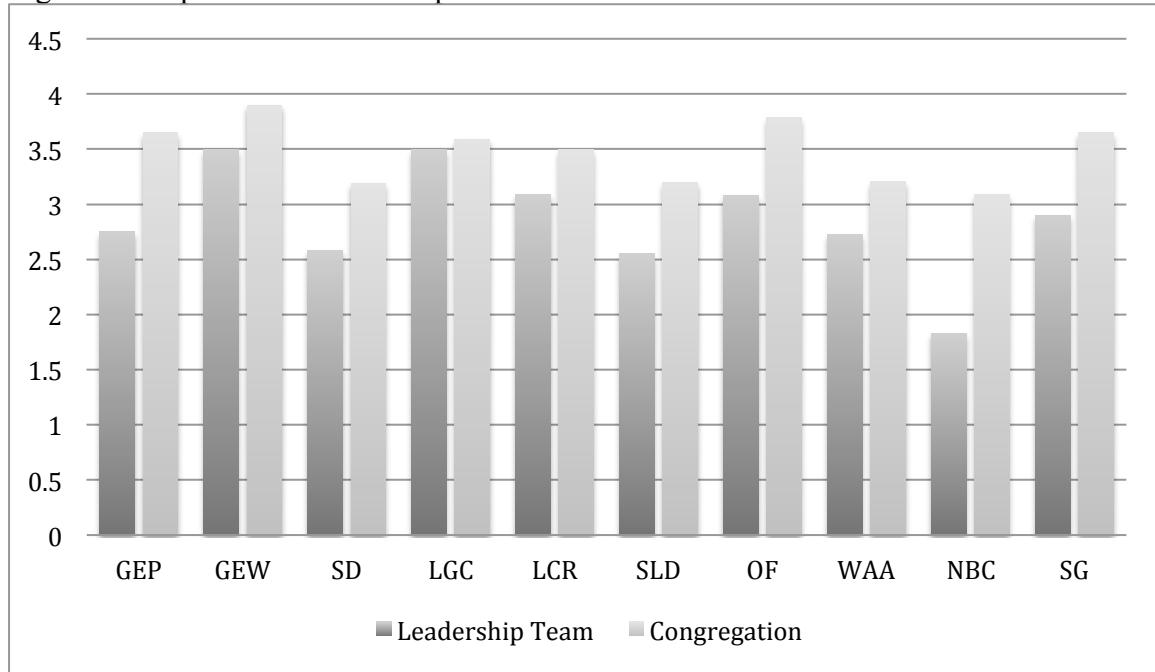
Table 2. Areas in need of improvement

Congregation	Leadership
44% Networking with the body of Christ	50% Spiritual disciplines; networking with the body of Christ
40% Servant-leadership development	42% Servant-leadership development; wise administration & accountability
38% Spiritual Disciplines	33% God's empowering presence; Stewardship & generosity

In figure 5, the leadership and congregation overall responses for each of the ten major areas are displayed side by side. The congregation responses are more positive in all major areas. There is consistent agreement between the leadership and the congregation. The 3.48 average congregation response is good and would tend to demonstrate that the congregation is pleased overall with the church. However, there is a significant gap between the congregation average response and the leadership average response. While the 3.48 average response for the congregation is good, the 2.85 average response for the leadership suggests less satisfaction. The leadership team suspects that the lower leadership figure may reflect circumstances leading to the recent resignation of

our senior pastor. This figure also shows that an outward focus ranked second only to God-exalting worship for the congregation. Additionally, the question: "How well does our church give generous portions of the annual budget to local and international missions?" had the second highest mean score of 4.17.

Figure 5. Snap shot of overall responses



The 10 Characteristics

- 1 **GEP**-God's Empowering Presence
- 2 **GEW**-God-Exalting Worship
- 3 **SD**-Spiritual Disciplines
- 4 **LGC**-Learning & Growing in the Community
- 5 **LCR**-Loving & Caring Relationships
- 6 **SLD**-Servant-Leadership Development
- 7 **OF**-An Outward Focus
- 8 **WAA**-Wise Administration & Accountability
- 9 **NBC**-Networking with the Body of Christ
- 10 **SG**-Stewardship & Generosity

Once the survey was completed and the FCC leadership began to sift through the data, they utilized a tool from Stephen Macchia's *Becoming a Healthy Church Workbook* called "Seven Planning Questions".⁶ The purpose of this tool was to help FCC identify the important lessons from the CHAT data, articulate some realistic goals, and then form an action plan. While most of the data considered was from CHAT, they used multiple sources to collect pertinent information to plan their future.

First, they accomplished a spiritual needs assessment by asking themselves, "What are the greatest spiritual needs of our church and our community?" Here they noted: (1) In their population, 18% have been at FCC less than one year. Since they have not grown the same 18% during this past year, they have a significant amount of people coming to FCC for a time and then not returning. (2) Their population of individuals approaching retirement represents 34%. This is an excellent opportunity for the church to provide assistance in retirement planning and equipping them for ministry. (3) The under-50 group represents nearly two-thirds of our population. This group has little discretionary time and will require the FCC leadership team to be creative in getting them involved in the life of the church. (4) Only 10% have been at FCC for over ten years. This is a relatively low percentage. It shows that they have few people who were present when FCC started nearly 25 years ago. Few people have any institutional memory about why FCC was started and why they exist as a church. Therefore, it stresses a need for them to articulate their vision and mission frequently. (5) The congregation is 66% college educated. (6) Help with parenting skills is a common request. (7) Marriages are under attack and, like parenting, represent a common need. (8) While one of the top three

⁶ Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church Workbook* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2001), 84-98.

strengths was loving and caring relationships, they still received several additional comments that indicate some are struggling to find community. Comments such as, "We love our church, but in many ways it feels "too big" and/or non-personal. We've been going for 3 years and other than the few people in our small group, we haven't really been able to connect with other people" and "I think there are opportunities but there is a lack of meshing within already established groups. Friends has some well established long term groups that tend to gravitate just towards themselves and newcomers may not feel very welcome because of this" indicate that they should still consider community as a need. (9) The lack of a specific ministry for their significant (30%) single's population signals a clear need. (10) The FCC leadership team has identified discipleship as a need for several years. (11) Transparency and better communication between the congregation and leadership team is a need that has been highlighted during our recent senior pastor's resignation. (12) Numerous additional comments reflect a need to have more emphasis on prayer: "More emphasis on prayer life and the use of gifts is needed," and "I do miss the days when we had more of a prayer ministry - that is, times set aside outside of the regular services where we came together just to pray for needs and each other." (13) They have a clear need to better emphasize baptisms and communion.

Second, they asked themselves, "What are the greatest strengths and weaknesses of FCC?" The survey responses indicate that the top three greatest strengths common to leadership and congregation are God-exalting worship, God's empowering presence, and loving and caring relationships. Their top three greatest weaknesses common to leadership and congregation are networking with the body of Christ, servant-leadership development and spiritual disciplines.

Third, they considered opportunities and threats or barriers. They asked themselves, “What are the most significant ministry opportunities for and potential threats (or barriers) to our church, given the answers to the first two questions?” After reviewing the first two questions, they determined that they would focus on two or three of their strengths and fine-tune them to make them even better. Additionally, they would take just one of their weaknesses and seek to become more effective in that area. By doing this, they hoped to emphasize those things FCC does well while growing stronger in an area where they are weaker. Following that logic, they chose God-exalting worship, loving and caring relationships, and God’s empowering presence as strong areas to fine tune. Servant-leadership development was identified as the weak area in which to become more effective.

Fourth, they brainstormed by asking the question, “What appear to be the most viable options for strengthening the ministry of our church?” Focusing on servant-leadership development, they suggested the following items: clarify FCC leadership structure, leadership training for the FCC leadership team and board, leadership conference, class to train discipleship group leaders, initiate *Aslan Academy*, and FCC leadership team retreat to concentrate on team building and leadership training.

Fifth, they asked, “What is the primary ministry platform on which our specific ministries should be built?” The vision statement to which FCC is committed is to call the church to know God, to know each other, and to equip the saints to make him known. Our primary ministries are: family and children’s ministries, small groups, women’s ministries, men’s ministries, Celebrate Recovery, host ministries, youth ministries, Christian Life and Service Seminars and meals ministry.

The sixth step was to ask themselves, “What goals is the Holy Spirit leading us to strive for to enhance our church’s ministry over the next year? After considering the information above, they believed that God would have them move forward with the following goal: To initiate *Aslan Academy* by March 15, 2015. It meets a desperate need for discipling children while the parents are being discipled themselves as they prepare to teach their children. This is a creative way to get some of the under-50 year group involved. While they may not desire to allocate time to attend a discipleship group for them personally, the chances are greater that they would commit to a group that is related to parenting their children. The program is servant-leadership training for the parents as well as their children. Since the family and children ministries have been identified as being strong, placing the leadership for *Aslan Academy* within that ministry helps to make a strong area even stronger. Additionally, this program could be an area for the older population to get involved in helping to mentor some of the younger parents.

Seventh, they considered, “What action steps must we accomplish to achieve this goal?” The Director of Family and Children’s Ministries, the author, and his wife, Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education at the University of Alaska Fairbanks would lead the program. The cost of books is approximately \$250 per family and would be covered by the church budget.

The Project Thesis

Since the beginning of creation it has been God’s plan to have peoples from all nations to glorify him. God revealed his plan initially to Abraham but in these last days he has made a way, through Christ, for his plan to be fulfilled through the church. His method is for the church to make disciples who will make disciples in all nations.

Disciples glorify God. Making disciples is best done through small groups that are guided by the truth and who have honest and accountable relationships. This is most naturally exemplified in God's kingdom within the family unit. It is God's most basic and effective discipleship unit. Parenting is discipling. Therefore, the church must be intentional in equipping and supporting parents in the ministry of discipling their children. Thesis question: Is the *Aslan Academy* program an effective tool for equipping parents of FCC to disciple their children?

The Project Assumptions

This project assumes: (1) Most parents have never received intentional discipleship training. Therefore, most have never been trained to study the Bible on their own, most have values different from the Kingdom of God, most have a poor prayer life, and most know little about spiritual warfare. (2) Parents often do not intentionally disciple their children because they feel unprepared or do not know where to start. (3) Setting priorities and time management are issues for most.

The Project Methodology

The *Aslan Academy* is offered by the C.S. Lewis Institute for the purpose of helping parents teach and equip their children to become disciples of Jesus Christ. The program draws its name from the lion in C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*. The program is specifically designed for the parent who wants to help their children grow spiritually but doesn't know where to start. Each of the seven steps includes four different elements to include: (1) prayer, (2) read and study, (3) apply, and (4) family activities. The six components interwoven throughout the program include: (1) reviewing the fundamentals, (2) understanding and encouraging heart change, (3) developing character

and faith that lasts, (4) teaching the Bible to your children, (5) introducing spiritual disciplines to your children, and (6) helping children understand and explain their faith. Monthly gatherings for the parents encourage and equip them in ministry to their children. This is also an effective way to build community among the parents and offer opportunities to pray for one another. The program is self-paced.⁷ A focus group is convened to collect data.

The Project Parameters

The *Aslan Academy* is designed for ages pre-kindergarten through teen. Participation in this project is limited to no more than twelve families. It is limited by inviting only families who had expressed a specific desire to disciple their children. Commitment for the project is for one year.

Summary

This chapter highlighted the lack of an effective program at FCC to equip parents to disciple their children as the issue this thesis-project addresses. The ministry setting was described by reviewing results of a CHAT survey conducted during October 2014. The leadership team of FCC selected the *Aslan Academy* program to equip parents to disciple their children. The question this thesis-project answers is this: Is the *Aslan Academy* program an effective tool for equipping parents of FCC to disciple their children? A focus group is convened to collect data.

⁷ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 7-9.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

Chapter Two will explore the biblical and theological principles that are foundational to establishing the importance of equipping parents to disciple their children. The first section will examine God's global plan to bless all nations. Both Old and New Testament passages will be considered. Then, in light of God's global plan, the second section will examine God's plan for the family from Old Testament passages first and then from significant New Testament passages.

God's Global Plan

Old Testament

By its name, the book of Genesis (בראשית) identifies itself as the book of beginnings: the beginning of creation, the beginning of human's disobedience, and the beginning of God's redemption.

After Adam and Eve's disobedience, it was not Adam and Eve who went searching for God. Rather, it was God who went searching for them. While they were hiding from God, it was God calling out to them, "Where are you?"¹ Since the fall of humanity, God has been the initiator of reviving his creation by showing his divine grace.

The story of Noah is a story of God's divine grace.² When humans began to multiply,

The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord

¹ Gen 3:8-9. All scripture citations are taken from the English Standard Version, 2001, unless otherwise noted.

² John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Genesis-Leviticus*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 116.

regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, “I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them.” But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.³

In stark contrast to the good that God saw in the creation account,⁴ here the Lord sees the wickedness of man stated in a most emphatic manner. “Man’s evil is presented extensively and intensively, the latter with devastating force in the words “every” . . . “only” . . . “continually.”⁵ “By pronouncing that God regretted and was grieved, “the author shows that the grief and pain of human sin was not felt only by humankind. God himself was grieved by the sin of humankind.”⁶ Yet, amid all the expressions of God’s judgment, Noah is favored with divine grace. He does all that God commanded him,⁷ to include staying inside the ark until commanded to come out. After building an altar to the Lord, God blesses him, instructs him to be fruitful and multiply, and establishes a covenant with him:

Then God said to Noah, “Go out from the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons’ wives with you. Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—that they may swarm on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.” So Noah went out, and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives with him. Every beast, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out by families from the ark.

Then Noah built an altar to the Lord and took some of every clean animal and some of every clean bird and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.”

And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply

³ Genesis 6:5-8.

⁴ Genesis 1:31.

⁵ Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 85.

⁶ Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 117-118.

⁷ Genesis 6:22.

and fill the earth. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth and upon every bird of the heavens, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea. Into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. And for your lifeblood I will require a reckoning: from every beast I will require it and from man. From his fellow man I will require a reckoning for the life of man.

“Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image. And you, be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it.”

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, “Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth.⁸

Revival is the sovereign work of God. He alone desires to revive not only his people but all the nations of the earth as well.⁹ His covenant with Abram created a community that would be called his people.¹⁰ He would make them a great nation and bless them so that they would bless all the families of the earth:

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy- five years old when he departed from Haran. And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him.¹¹

John H. Sailhamer identifies seven verbal and thematic parallels between God's calling out of Noah in Genesis 8:15-9:9 and God's call of Abraham in Genesis 12:1-7: (1)

⁸ Genesis 8:15-9:10.

⁹ 2 Chronicles 6:32-33.

¹⁰ Genesis 13:14-17.

¹¹ Genesis 12:1-7.

“Then God said to Noah” in Genesis 8:15 and “The Lord said to Abraham” in Genesis 12:1, (2) “Go out from the ark” in Genesis 8:16 and “Go from your country” in Genesis 12:1, (3) “So Noah went out” in Genesis 8:18 and “So Abram went” in Genesis 12:4, (4) “The Noah built an altar to the Lord” in Genesis 8:20 and “So he built there an altar to the Lord” in Genesis 12:7, (5) “And God blessed Noah” in Genesis 9:1 and “And I will bless you” in Genesis 12:2, (6) “Be fruitful and multiply” in Genesis 9:1 and “And I will make of you a great nation” in Genesis 12:2, and (7) “Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you” in Genesis 9:9 and “To your offspring I will give this land” in Genesis 12:7.¹²

The calling for Israel to be God’s people and to be a blessing to the nations was reiterated and confirmed in the Exodus from Egypt, “where God demonstrated his loving care and grace by providing deliverance from bondage and protective guidance as he went ahead of them during their travels in the wilderness (Exodus 13:21-22).”¹³ God blesses his people so that they will bless others and he provides them with the resources they need to accomplish their mission.

New Testament

In his appointed time, God sent his son out of his love for humanity and his desire for them to have eternal life.¹⁴ In the sending of his son, God remained consistent in his mission to bless not only his people but to bless all the nations through them. He sent the Christ for glory to his people Israel but also as a light for revelation to the Gentiles.¹⁵

When Christ began his ministry, he soon called the first of his disciples to follow

¹² Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 128.

¹³ Michael Wilkins, *Following the Master: A Biblical Theology of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 57.

¹⁴ John 3:16.

¹⁵ Luke 2:30-32.

him with the promise that he would make them fishers of men.¹⁶ After some time, the number of the disciples of Christ had grown to be quite large¹⁷ and Christ chose from them twelve, whom he named apostles.¹⁸ “The circumstances of the lives of these Twelve were quite different from the circumstances of the lives of the other disciples, because they were called to follow Jesus around and to join him in the missionary outreach to Israel.”¹⁹

As his relationship with the Twelve began to mature, he taught them about the kingdom of God and began to challenge them as to who he was. After Peter confessed him as the Christ, the Son of the living God, Jesus began to teach his disciples of his impending death and resurrection, and that the cost of continuing to follow him would be high.²⁰

Christ began to explain his imminent departure to his disciples by saying that the Father would give them another helper to be with them forever. He would dwell with them and be in them. The person who loves Jesus will keep his commandments, and he and his father will love the one who loves Jesus. Additionally he would manifest himself to him. When Judas (not Iscariot) heard Jesus, he was curious as to why he would manifest himself to them and not to the world.²¹ With this question, he began teaching them that the Father would send the Holy Spirit to teach them all things, bring to their remembrance all things that Christ had said, and give them peace.²² Additionally, he helps them understand that, “Every branch in me that does not bear fruit he takes away,

¹⁶ Matthew 4:19, Mark 1:17.

¹⁷ Luke 6:17.

¹⁸ Luke 6:13.

¹⁹ Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 112.

²⁰ Matthew 16:13-28, Mark 8:27-38, Luke 9:18-27.

²¹ John 14:15-22.

²² John 14:26-27.

and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit,”²³ “Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit,”²⁴ “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”²⁵ After stressing abiding in him and he in them, bearing fruit and loving one another, he turned again to the subject of the importance of the Holy Spirit. He told them that it was to their advantage that he went away, for if he did not, the Holy Spirit would not come. But, when he comes, “He will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no longer; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged.”²⁶ Additionally, he would guide them into all truth, declare to them the things that are to come and glorify Christ.²⁷ Jesus was preparing them for their ministry to one another and to all the nations after his departure.

Christ had planned a meeting with the disciples for after his resurrection. It was apparently significant to him. What he planned to say was important. During one of the last meetings before his crucifixion that Christ had with his disciples, he told them "after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee."²⁸ Then, after his resurrection, an angel appears to the two women at his tomb. He explains that Christ has risen from the dead and that they are to "go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him."²⁹ After the two women left the tomb, Jesus himself met them and reminded them to "go and tell my brothers to

²³ John 15:2.

²⁴ John 15:5.

²⁵ John 15:12.

²⁶ John 16:8-11.

²⁷ John 16:13-14.

²⁸ Matthew 26:32.

²⁹ Matthew 28:7.

go to Galilee, and there they will see me.”³⁰

As the eleven arrived at the designated meeting place where Christ’s ministry began³¹ and came into the presence of the risen Christ, they worshiped him, but some doubted.³² Christ made their mission clear by saying, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”³³

While there are four verbs found in this commission, the only imperative verb is μαθητεύσατε, “make disciples.” The other three verbs are subordinate participles to the main verb that take on imperatival force.³⁴ The disciples would have understood Jesus to mean that he expected them to do with others what he had done with them. As he had made them into disciples, he expects disciples to make other disciples. As Wilkins points out,

Jesus summoned his disciples in a way similar to the way God called Israel to be the blessed people and to be a blessing for others. Even as Israel was not called solely to be God’s people and enjoy his blessing but were in turn to be the source of blessing to all the nations of the earth, so also when Jesus issued his call it meant both a call to enter into a discipleship relationship with him and to become fellow workers with him in the kingdom.³⁵

They are to go and make disciples of “all the nations.” That the command to make disciples reaches to “all the nations” speaks of God’s faithfulness to fulfill his promise to Abram through the church,

³⁰ Matthew 28:10.

³¹ Matthew 4:12.

³² Matthew 28:17.

³³ Matthew 28:18-20.

³⁴ Donald Hagner. *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 33B, *Matthew 14-28* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 886.

³⁵ Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 186-187.

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”³⁶

Matthew's purpose of demonstrating Jesus as the Messiah of the world starts with, “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham”³⁷ and climaxes with the command to make disciples of all nations. With Luke's words, “that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem,”³⁸ Christ's ministry on earth is viewed as the beginning of what would later become an offer of worldwide salvation through the church.³⁹ According to Karl Barth, “This apostolic Church, existing not for itself, but “for Christ,” on behalf of him (2 Corinthians 5:20), is the decisive event of the eschaton that has broken into time.”⁴⁰

Disciples are to make disciples by baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that Christ has commanded. Baptism here is in contrast to John's baptism. As such, “This baptism brings a person into an existence that is fundamentally determined by, i.e., ruled by, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.”⁴¹ This is the evangelism part of the Great Commission. It is the public demonstration of the disciple's choice to follow Christ and acknowledges their entrance into the family of believers in the Messiah. In considering the significance of becoming a part of the Christian community, Bonhoeffer speaks of an “alien righteousness” that

³⁶ Genesis 12:1-3.

³⁷ Matthew 1:1.

³⁸ Luke 24:47.

³⁹ Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 188-189.

⁴⁰ Karl Barth, “An Exegetical Study of Matthew 28:16-20,” in *Classics of Christian Missions*, ed. Francis M. DuBose (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1979), 45.

⁴¹ Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, 888.

comes from outside ourselves and defines the goal of Christian community thusly:

They meet one another as bringers of the message of salvation. As, such God permits them to meet together and gives them community. Their fellowship is founded solely upon Jesus Christ and this “alien righteousness.” All we can say, therefore, is: the community of Christians springs solely from the Biblical and Reformation message of the justification of man through grace alone; this alone is the basis of the longing of Christians for one another.⁴²

In addition to baptizing, the disciples are to make disciples by teaching. Both are required. Matthew has been diligent to stress the teaching of Christ.⁴³ Christ is commanding his disciples to do as they have seen him do while keeping in mind that “Whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”⁴⁴

Encompassing the commission is the statement that Christ has all authority in heaven and on earth and the promise that he is with them to the end of the age. These statements reflect back to Daniel 7:14, “And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed” and Matthew 1:23, “Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel (which means, God with us).” His presence with us through the person of the Holy Spirit is the key to making disciples. He is the one who convicts, converts and causes growth. We must allow for the work of the Spirit, from beginning to end, in all our discipleship.⁴⁵ Jesus promises his presence to the “end of the

⁴² Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1954), 22-23.

⁴³ Matthew 4:23, 5:2, 7:29, 9:35, 11:1, 13:34, 21:23, 22:16, 22:33.

⁴⁴ Matthew 5:19.

⁴⁵ Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 120-121.

age.”⁴⁶ “The evangelist here not only writes history but provides a promise having relevance to his own contemporaries and indeed to the disciples composing the church down to the end of the eon.”⁴⁷ Paul confirms that Christ’s presence will forever be with the church, “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”⁴⁸

According to Richard Lovelace, there are four essential elements of renewal provided for in the atonement as can be witnessed from church history. The first two benefits, justification and sanctification, are discussed by Paul saying,

Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him. (Colossians 2:6-15)⁴⁹

“This passage speaks on the one hand of justification and the forgiveness of sins under the figure of nailing the certificate of our debt on the cross, and on the other hand of regeneration and progressive sanctification in the metaphor of circumcision linked

⁴⁶ Matthew 28:20.

⁴⁷ Hagner. *Matthew 14-28*, 889.

⁴⁸ Rom 8:38-39.

⁴⁹ Richard F. Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 74-76.

with that of death and resurrection.”⁵⁰ Now, with Christ’s authority established and his presence promised,⁵¹ the disciples have all the essential elements for renewal. They have all they need to accomplish their mission. “Believers are therefore covered by the perfect righteousness of Christ reckoned to them in justification; strengthened by the power of Christ’s life in sanctification; given immediate access to the mind and heart of Christ by the indwelling of the Spirit; and equipped with the authority of Christ in resisting, exposing and expelling the forces of darkness.”⁵²

As a disciple then, one is called into a relationship with Jesus Christ based on his gospel of grace, growing in obedience within a community of believers and empowered by the Holy Spirit to reproduce others who do the same. Christ calls us to do what he did. We glorify God by making disciples⁵³ and by loving others as he loved.⁵⁴ The Great Commission “Calls us to make disciples by being a people who orbit around Jesus and his blood-bought benefits, not performance and self-made efforts. Disciples are gospel people who introduce and reintroduce themselves and others to the person and power of Jesus over and over again. A disciple of Jesus never stops learning the gospel, relating in the gospel, and communicating the gospel.”⁵⁵

Christ’s strategy of the first disciples making other disciples of all nations became the strategy of the early church beginning at Pentecost. From the time they received the promised Holy Spirit,⁵⁶ the disciples spoke the Word with boldness in Jerusalem and over

⁵⁰ Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 76.

⁵¹ Matthew 28:18, 20.

⁵² Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 77.

⁵³ John 15:8, 17:4.

⁵⁴ John 15:12, 17:6-19.

⁵⁵ Jonathan K. Dodson, *Gospel-Centered Discipleship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 41.

⁵⁶ Acts 1:8.

8000 people believed in Christ within the first few days.⁵⁷ After the stoning of Stephen,⁵⁸ persecution against the church in Jerusalem forced them to scatter throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria.⁵⁹ Those who were scattered continued to preach the gospel.⁶⁰ The church grew as a result of living out the Great Commission in the surrounding nations. After Paul was stoned to near death in Lystra, he joined up with Barnabas and went to Derbe. “When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.”⁶¹ And to the church at Thessalonica, Paul reminds them of his visit with them saying,

But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.⁶²

The early church was teaching as Christ had taught the original disciples so that the new believers could become obedient disciples.⁶³ Christ’s strategy to reach all nations became the strategy of the early church and it is still applicable to the church today.

Thus far, this chapter has focused on the global plan of God to reach the nations. The remainder of this chapter will focus on the integral part of the family in his plan.

⁵⁷ Acts 2:37-42, 4:1-4.

⁵⁸ Acts 7:54-60.

⁵⁹ Acts 8:1.

⁶⁰ Acts 8:4.

⁶¹ Acts 14:21-22.

⁶² 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12.

⁶³ Wilkins, *Following the Master*, 119.

God's Family Plan

Old Testament

The natural community in God's plan to reach all nations for Israel, Christ, and the church is the family. Sometime after receiving the promise of becoming a great nation,⁶⁴ Abraham is met at the door of his tent by three men identified as an appearance from the Lord.⁶⁵ The Lord tells Abraham, with Sarah listening, that Sarah would give birth to a son in about one year.⁶⁶ Then the Lord explains his motivation for giving Abraham and Sarah a son:

The Lord said, “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him.”⁶⁷

“His words are concise, but they have far-reaching consequences. This passage looks back to the original promise that Abraham will become a “great . . . nation” (cf. 12:2a) and that “all nations on earth will be blessed through him” (cf. 12:3b).”⁶⁸ It declares that God has chosen Abraham and then continues to articulate the purpose for his choosing. Abraham is chosen in order that “he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice”. This then will lead to the Lord fulfilling his promise to Abraham. This is a “revealing comment on parental responsibility”⁶⁹ consistent with several other texts in Genesis.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Genesis 12:1-2.

⁶⁵ Genesis 18:1-2.

⁶⁶ Genesis 18:10.

⁶⁷ Genesis 18:17-19.

⁶⁸ Sailhamer, “Genesis,” 191.

⁶⁹ Kidner, *Genesis*, 133.

⁷⁰ Genesis 17:9-10, 22:12-18, 26:1-5.

Having traversed the wilderness for forty years with the Israelites and having experienced God's love and faithfulness during that same time, Moses is nearing the end of his journey out of Egypt. Speaking to the Israelites, he reminds them, "It is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."⁷¹ In the book of Deuteronomy, "everything is predicated on Yahweh's love and faithfulness and his actions that flow out of that love and faithfulness."⁷²

Deuteronomy is considered a literary bridge between the Torah and the book of Joshua. It was written for "religious instruction and education in ancient Israel."⁷³ The Israelites had exhibited a high degree of loyalty to God when the Torah was given at Sinai. Deuteronomy's purpose is to help maintain that same level of loyalty.⁷⁴ This uncompromising loyalty to God is what drives the book from beginning to end. "This comes out in any number of ways, but its primary moment is in the Shema (6:4-5), which became the distinguishing mark of Judaism and is identified by Jesus as "the first commandment":"⁷⁵ "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might."

The text goes on to say:

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between

⁷¹ Deuteronomy 7:8.

⁷² Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 57.

⁷³ Duane L. Christensen, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 6A, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), lvii.

⁷⁴ Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9*, lvii.

⁷⁵ Fee and Stuart, *Book by Book*, 57.

your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.⁷⁶

“In short, Deuteronomy represents a very early, and a remarkably comprehensive, attempt to reform and transmit religion by means of a program of religious education in which every person was to be included, from the king as the head of the nation to each child in every home.”⁷⁷ In verse 7,⁷⁸ God commands the Israelites to teach “these words” that I command you diligently to your children. “The future of Israel depends on the transmission of the experience of God’s mighty acts in history and his demands to each successive generation.”⁷⁹

It is not the future of the Israelites only that depends on the training of their children but also the Christian church. Sylvia Wilkey Collinson states that, “Both Jews and Christians acknowledge the importance of the parenting model of teaching as fundamental to the passage of faith from generation to generation.”⁸⁰ With the emphasis placed on the training of children in the home, “It would be odd if Christians did not bestow equal pains on their children and if this did not, at least frequently, bear fruit.”⁸¹

New Testament

Within the New Testament, there are three similar passages that discuss household duties: Ephesians 5:21-6:9; 1 Peter 2:13-3:7; and Colossians 3:18-4:1. First, the Ephesians passage is unique in that it “opens with a call to mutual subordination.”⁸²

⁷⁶ Deuteronomy 6:6-9.

⁷⁷ Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9*, lvii.

⁷⁸ cf. Deuteronomy 4:9-10; 11:18-19; 31:12-13; 32:45-46.

⁷⁹ Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1:1-21:9*, 81.

⁸⁰ Sylvia Wilkey Collinson, *Making Disciples: The Significance of Jesus’ Educational Methods for Today’s Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 149.

⁸¹ Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 333.

⁸² Markus Barth, trans., *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 34A, *Ephesians: Translation and Commentary on Chapters 4-6* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 609.

When Paul writes, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ,”⁸³ he is anticipating all that he “is about to say not only to wives, children, and slaves, but also to husbands, fathers, and masters, about the specific respect they owe because of Christ to those with whom they live together either by choice, or by birth, or by historical circumstances.”⁸⁴ It is within this context that Paul writes: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord.”⁸⁵ Michael Green comments that,

The New Testament has little enough to say about the teaching and training of a child, but it is clear that children can partake in the kingdom of heaven, that their attitude of trusting obedience is in fact a model for adults to follow if they are to gain eternal life. The duty of the parents to train up their children is paramount: it is through the witness and example of the Christian home that children are brought into and nourished within the fellowship.⁸⁶

Luke records an example of an early New Testament church family. As Paul was leaving Tyre for Jerusalem, he writes, “When our days there were ended, we departed and went on our journey, and they all, with wives and children, accompanied us until we were outside the city. And kneeling down on the beach, we prayed and said farewell to one another. Then we went on board the ship, and they returned home.”⁸⁷

Second, the household code of 1 Peter 2:13-3:7 reads,

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are

⁸³ Ephesians 5:21, NIV.

⁸⁴ Barth, *Ephesians*, 609.

⁸⁵ Ephesians 6:1-4.

⁸⁶ Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church*, 333-334.

⁸⁷ Acts 21:5-6.

free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust. For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed. For you were straying like sheep, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious. For this is how the holy women who hoped in God used to adorn themselves, by submitting to their own husbands, as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord. And you are her children, if you do good and do not fear anything that is frightening.

Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.⁸⁸

Peter authored this letter to the mostly new gentile believers suffering persecution in the five Roman provinces of northwest Asia Minor.⁸⁹ He is writing them to encourage them in their suffering and to call them to follow Christ in the midst of their suffering. The call to follow Christ comes in the context of stable social relationships. Citizens are called in their relation to the government institutions.⁹⁰ Slaves are called in relation to their masters.⁹¹ Wives are called in relation to their husbands.⁹² Husbands are called in relation to their wives.⁹³

⁸⁸ 1 Peter 2:13-3:7.

⁸⁹ Fee and Stuart, *Book by Book*, 402.

⁹⁰ 1 Peter 2:13-17.

⁹¹ 1 Peter 2:18-25.

J. Ramsey Michaels comments on this section,

If the Romans wanted the household to be the empire in miniature, Peter saw the possibility of it becoming the church in miniature. It seldom did so because too often the husband was not the believer. Yet when husband and wife are believers — and husbands treat their wives as “co-heirs of the grace of life” — Peter is confident that their “prayers will not be hindered” (3:7). In such instances, the family becomes a model for the worshiping and ministering congregations. As such, it becomes the vehicle of “the grace of life” prophesied long ago (1:10) and soon to be brought about in its fullness “when Jesus Christ is revealed” (1:13).⁹⁴

Third, Colossians 3:18-4:1 reads,

Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. Husbands, love your wives, and do not be harsh with them. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged. Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye- service, as people- pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.

Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.⁹⁵

Similar to the Ephesians and 1 Peter passages above, the content of Paul’s admonitions to the Colossians is not new. “Plutarch or Seneca, for example, might similarly have admonished wives to be submissive and children to be obedient.”⁹⁶ Rather, Paul views family relationships “as is fitting in the Lord,”⁹⁷ and submitting to one another “for this pleases the Lord.”⁹⁸ “Paul is not so much setting forth rules for conduct as

⁹² 1 Peter 3:1-6.

⁹³ 1 Peter 3:7.

⁹⁴ J. Ramsey Michaels, “Going to Heaven with Jesus: From 1 Peter to Pilgrim’s Progress,” in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 265-266.

⁹⁵ Colossians 3:18-4:1.

⁹⁶ Michael P. Knowles, “Christ in You, the Hope of Glory: Discipleship in Colossians,” in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, 199.

⁹⁷ Colossians 3:18.

⁹⁸ Colossians 3:20.

insisting on the expression of a new reality.”⁹⁹ “Relationships within the family and household were themselves part of Christian vocation and the first place where responsibility to the Lord should come to expression and be put to the test.”¹⁰⁰

Summary

This chapter has explored the biblical and theological principles that are foundational to establishing the importance of equipping parents to disciple their children. The first section explored God’s global plan to redeem all nations. Then, the second section articulated the pivotal role that the family plays in God’s plan. The family is where children are nourished in the faith and the fundamentals of following Christ are passed from generation to generation. While Chuck Lawless’ statement is specifically directed towards prayer, it appropriately summarizes this chapter with a reasonable call to action: “Faithful parents take advantage of every opportunity to teach their children to follow God . . . Regrettably, few churches challenge and train parents to do so.”¹⁰¹ FCC has identified *Aslan Academy* as a tool designed to train parents how to take advantage of opportunities to train their children to follow God.

⁹⁹ Knowles, “Christ in You, the Hope of Glory: Discipleship in Colossians,” in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, 199.

¹⁰⁰ James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 245.

¹⁰¹ Chuck Lawless, *Discipled Warriors: Growing Healthy Churches That Are Equipped for Spiritual Warfare* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2002), 160.

CHAPTER THREE

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Chapter Three interacts with other scholars who have written about relevant issues related to establishing the importance of equipping parents to disciple their children. The first section of this chapter discusses the traits of a healthy church and is framed according to Stephen Macchia's ten characteristics of a healthy church referred to in Chapter One. Those traits that are more pertinent for equipping parents to disciple their children will receive the most attention. The second section will discuss more specifically traits that apply to healthy families and the discipleship of their children.

“The context for healthy discipleship is a healthy church. We grow most effectively in environments conducive to our development. If this premise makes good sense, it’s only natural that we take the principles of church health and translate them to the pew, the home, the workplace, the community, and to the wider world.”¹ As a healthy church environment is conducive to growing healthy families so a healthy family is conducive to growing children who will become healthy disciples.

Healthy Churches

As president of Vision New England, Macchia had reached a place in his life where he was frustrated with the ineffectiveness of his life. As he began a time of realigning his life according to God’s principles and a self-evaluation process with his team, a list of ten characteristics of a healthy church emerged. Before examining the list, however, it is important to note that the Scriptures and prayer do not have their own

¹ Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Disciple: Ten Traits of a Vital Christian* (Lexington, MA: Leadership Transformations, 2013), 14.

categories in his list of ten. Instead, he and his team prefer to stress Scripture and prayer as central in every one of the ten characteristics.² Therefore, before exploring Macchia's characteristics, it is worthwhile to consider Gregory Frizzell's four practical patterns for powerful church prayer meetings as an aid to encouraging prayer as central.

By powerful prayer meetings, Frizzell means "nothing less than a powerful, relationship encounter with God Himself."³ His first pattern is a simple meeting of alternating corporate and individual prayer. Participants are urged to pray silently or quietly. Secondly, Frizzell suggests a meeting of combined corporate and small groups. This meeting starts with corporate prayer, moves to small group prayer and concludes with the corporate setting. The third pattern is a simple corporate prayer meeting. This pattern is most effective in small to midsize congregations. Lastly, he suggests a meeting characterized by a balance of corporate and small group prayer.⁴ With prayer established as the foundation to a healthy church, one can now focus attention to Macchia's list to structure this discussion.

God's Empowering Presence

The first characteristic of a healthy church is God's empowering presence. "The healthy church actively seeks the Holy Spirit's direction and empowerment for its daily life and ministry."⁵

This requires the church to acknowledge any independent spirit and place it under the lordship of Jesus Christ. When that is realized, the fruits and the gifts of the spirit will

² Stephen A. Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church: Ten Traits of a Vital Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), Chap. 1, iBooks.

³ Gregory R. Frizzell, *Biblical Patterns for Powerful Church Prayer Meetings: God's Changeless Path to Sweeping Revival and Evangelism* (Fulton, KY: The Master Design, 1999), 7.

⁴ Frizzell, *Biblical Patterns for Powerful Church Prayer Meetings*, 21-37.

⁵ Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church*, Chap. 2.

be free to operate through its members. “Life in the present is empowered by the God who dwells among us and in us. As the personal presence of God, the Spirit is not merely some “force” or “influence.” The living God is a God of power; and by the Spirit the power of the living God is present with and for us.”⁶

God-exalting Worship

The second characteristic is God-exalting worship. “The healthy church gathers regularly as the local expression of the body of Christ to worship God in ways that engage the heart, mind, soul, and strength of the people.”⁷

This characteristic focuses primarily on corporate worship. While that is undoubtedly an important part of the Christian experience, John Piper is quick to point out that the New Testament letters have very little to say about the subject. Rather, he says, “What we find in the New Testament is an utterly stunning degree of indifference to worship as an outward form and an utterly radical intensification of worship as an inward experience of the heart.”⁸ It’s not that it is improper to worship using external forms in a particular place but this is not what makes true worship. Referring to John 4:20-24, Piper emphasizes that true worship is not bound by any place or form. Rather, Jesus calls us to worship “in spirit and in truth.”⁹

⁶ Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1994), 8.

⁷ Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church*, Chap. 3.

⁸ John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad!: The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 239-240.

⁹ Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad!*, 242.

Spiritual Disciplines

The third characteristic is spiritual disciplines. “The healthy church provides training, models, and resources for members of all ages to develop their daily spiritual disciplines.”¹⁰

Dallas Willard defines spiritual disciplines as “activities of mind and body purposefully undertaken, to bring our personality and total being into effective cooperation with the divine order.”¹¹ They can be separated into two areas: disciplines of abstinence and disciplines of engagement. The disciplines of abstinence involve “abstaining to some degree and for some time from the satisfaction of what we generally regard as normal and legitimate desires.”¹² Examples could include, abstaining from interaction with other humans, abstaining from sound, abstaining from food, abstaining from using money merely for gratifying our desires, abstaining from sex, abstaining from publicizing our good deeds and qualities, and abstaining from acquiring that which is necessary for living. The disciplines of engagement then involve engaging in activities that we would typically tend to omit, such as: engaging God’s Word, engaging in worship, engaging in celebration, engaging in serving others, engaging in conversing with God, engaging in gathering with other believers, engaging in confession, and engaging in submission.¹³

¹⁰ Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church*, Chap. 4.

¹¹ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1988), 68.

¹² Willard, *The Spiritual Disciplines*, 159.

¹³ Willard, *The Spiritual Disciplines*, 158-190.

Learning and Growing in Community

The fourth characteristic is learning and growing in community. “The healthy church encourages believers to grow in their walk with God and with one another in the context of a safe, affirming environment.”¹⁴

It is common for church leaders to desire their church members grow in their walk with God and with one another. In order to help make that growth a reality, the approach of some congregations has been to design and fund church programs and activities that would help people to grow. Then the goal would be to encourage as many people as possible to attend the church functions with the anticipation that increased attendance would produce spiritual growth. After operating with this assumption for nearly thirty years, Willow Creek Community Church in Barrington, IL discovered that increased attendance in church activities does not automatically produce spiritual growth.

Their extensive research indicated that increased attendance was a good predictor that one would be more likely to serve, tithe, etc. But attendance “alone made no direct impact on growing the heart.”¹⁵ Instead, they found that growing the heart centers “on a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.”¹⁶ This is a key point. Spiritual growth comes from a relationship, a relationship not with the church, but a relationship with the person of Jesus Christ. It is imperative then that the church understands its role not to be one of transforming people. That is God’s role and his alone. Therefore, it is rather the church’s role “to place people in the pathway of God’s transforming power.”¹⁷ It is with that role

¹⁴ Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church*, Chap. 5.

¹⁵ Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Reveal: Where are you?* (Barrington, IL: Willow Creek Resources, 2007), 36.

¹⁶ Hawkins and Parkinson, *Reveal*, 36.

¹⁷ Eric Geiger, Michael Kelley and Philip Nation, *Transformational Discipleship: How People Really Grow* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2012), 58.

of the church that the authors of *Transforming Discipleship: How People Really Grow* concern themselves.

As a response to their massive research project on discipleship, the authors offer a framework for the church to best fulfill their role. The heart of the framework is a concept they call the Transformational Sweet Spot (TSS). “The Transformational Sweet Spot is the synergy of truth, posture, and leaders that helps a disciple see Christ as the only God worthy of worship. The TSS occurs when healthy leaders give truth to a disciple who is in a vulnerable posture.”¹⁸ These three must be kept in proper focus to promote God’s transforming power.

Because the transformation process is long, healthy leaders are a necessity to stand beside the people in their transformation journey and to help them apply biblical truth to their life circumstances. The authors offer three lenses through which the healthy leader must observe truth: the lens of the gospel, the lens of the spiritual disciplines and the lens of the new identity of the believer. A person is most receptive to God’s truth when they are in a humble posture of “weakness, interdependence, and/or with an outward focus.”¹⁹

With a slightly different view of the best context for transformation, Neil Cole stresses the importance of community, accountability, confidentiality, flexibility and reproducibility within the setting of a group of two or three persons.²⁰

¹⁸ Geiger, Kelley and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 61-62.

¹⁹ Geiger, Kelley and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 132.

²⁰ Neil Cole, *Cultivating a Life for God: Multiplying Disciples Through Life Transformation Groups* (CMA Resources, 1999), Chap. 6, iBooks.

Commitment to Loving and Caring Relationships

The fifth characteristic of a healthy church is a commitment to loving and caring relationships. “The healthy church is intentional in its efforts to build loving, caring relationships within families, between members, and within the community it serves.”²¹

This comes from individuals making a decision to love the way Christ loves. The love comes from God. The follower of Christ obeys by sharing that love with others.

Ajith Fernando comments,

So for the Christian, love is a priority; it is an act of obedience. Looking at the way Christian love is described in the Bible, we realize that it is not a case of loving the lovable. Rather, it includes loving our enemies, blessing those who persecute us, being patient with people who are difficult to tolerate, visiting prisoners, and the like. These are actions that do not automatically happen, like falling in love. Christian love is decisive, we must make it happen.²²

Fernando concludes, “When we love, we are achieving the basic goal in the life of a Christian. Love is not only a means to an end; it is an end in itself.”²³ More specifically, Piper says it is the love of God, or worship, that is the goal.²⁴

Servant-leadership Development

Macchia’s sixth characteristic is servant-leadership development. “The healthy church identifies and develops individuals whom God has called and given the gift of leadership and challenges them to become servant-leaders.”²⁵

In his book, *Shepherds after My own Heart*, Tim Laniak refers to the “divine preference for human agency.”²⁶ God has demonstrated his desire to use people to

²¹ Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church*, Chap. 6.

²² Ajith Fernando, *Reclaiming Love: Radical Relationships in a Complex World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 21.

²³ Fernando, *Reclaiming Love*, 25.

²⁴ Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad!*, 21.

²⁵ Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church*, Chap. 7.

²⁶ Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 248.

accomplish his mission on earth. He looks to his servant-leaders to shepherd his people.

The shepherds he seeks are responsible to God first and foremost before they are responsible for his people secondarily. The responsibility is great and the temptation of pride is ever present. The scriptures are heavily populated with examples of those who have violated their trust. Shepherd leaders are empowered by the Holy Spirit and, as such, they must be developed to rely totally on the Holy Spirit as they provide, protect and guide God's people. "Shepherd leadership requires humility before God and responsiveness to God's people. It resists pretense, posturing and privilege."²⁷

Shepherding God's flock with humility is addressed by Peter in 1 Peter 5:1-5. He exhorts the elders of the church to be shepherds "not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock"²⁸ J. Ramsey Michaels comments that Peter's appeal to his fellow elders "places the accent not on the persons of the elders themselves (or on Peter himself) as moral examples, but on their humility, servanthood, and accountability to Christ."²⁹

Peter's appeal to the elders reflects back to the words of Christ in Matthew 20:25-28:

You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

Willard insists that, "We misunderstand this passage if we read it merely as instructions on how to become great. It is, rather, a statement on how those who are great

²⁷ Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart*, 249.

²⁸ 1 Peter 5:3, NIV.

²⁹ J. Ramsey Michaels, "Going to Heaven with Jesus: From 1 Peter to Pilgrim's Progress," in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 267.

are to behave.”³⁰ To be considered great in the Kingdom of God and yet remain a servant to others and Christ is a most difficult achievement. Willard maintains that the best way to achieve this balance is through the discipline of service. That is, by disciplining ourselves to serve others, “we are training ourselves away from arrogance, possessiveness, envy, resentment, or covetousness.”³¹

Outward Focus

The seventh characteristic is an outward focus. “The healthy church places high priority on communicating the truth of Jesus Christ and demonstrating his love to those outside the faith.”³²

Robert Coleman notes that the affirmation, mandate, and promise of Jesus Christ for executing the outward focus of the church can be found in Matthew 28:18-20. This passage is commonly referred to as the Great Commission. “The whole thrust of the Great Commission—giving direction and validity to every effort—is the discipling of all nations.”³³ God’s plan for the church is to reach out to all nations by making disciples. Coleman summarizes Christ’s commission to the church: “It simply enunciates the strategy implicit in His own ministry while He was with us in the flesh. Just as the Lord ordered His life on earth, now His own disciples are expected to follow in His steps.”³⁴

In Hebrews 11:8-10, Abraham was “called to go out to a place he would later receive as his inheritance.” Even though he did not know where he was going, he obeyed. He went “looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is

³⁰ Willard, *The Spiritual Disciplines*, 183.

³¹ Willard, *The Spiritual Disciplines*, 182.

³² Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church*, Chap. 8.

³³ Robert E. Coleman, *The Great Commission Lifestyle: Conforming Your Life to Kingdom Priorities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 1992), 52.

³⁴ Coleman, *The Great Commission Lifestyle*, 53.

God.” And so it is for anyone who “goes out” with Jesus. They go out not knowing where God’s call may take them or what the circumstances may bring. “It is not our place to tell Him where to take us or to suit His summons to our convenience; our part is to obey—to stake everything we are and everything that we have upon His honor and faithfulness.”³⁵

Throughout the ages, God’s servants have followed his call to various places in various circumstances. One of the greatest challenges has always been determining the most effective way to communicate the gospel within the context of different cultures, even within our own Western culture. After years of experience as a foreign missionary, Leslie Newbigin suggests that the same lessons and principals applied in a foreign context be applied to communicate the gospel within our own Western culture. In a culture with Christian roots and governed by pagan ideological assumptions, Newbigin calls for maintaining an eternal perspective. Of the essential elements for communicating the gospel, “the first must be the recovery and firm grasp of a true doctrine of the last things, of eschatology. The gospel is good news of the kingdom, and the kingdom is an eschatological concept. A true understanding of the last things is the first essential.”³⁶

When discussing church growth in Singapore, however, Keith Hinton has different priorities than Newbigin. The keys to success for his context are leadership and mobilizing the laity.

A good leader for church growth, especially in Singapore, is not democratic, not an administrator, nor an enabler. Rather, good leaders “should be encouraged to lead strongly and to demonstrate that they have a vision from the Lord, the gifts to implement

³⁵ Coleman, *The Great Commission Lifestyle*, 22.

³⁶ Leslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 134.

it and a special responsibility before God to make the crucial decisions relating to that dream.”³⁷

Closely associated with the need for good leadership is the need to mobilize the laity. Hinton stresses the need for mobilizing the laity with leadership that inspires, challenges, and encourages. This is particularly necessary in the areas of follow-up, nurture and general shepherding.³⁸

Most discussions on the most effective way to communicate the gospel within any given culture revolve around two elements: the message and the method. Some prefer to leave the message unchanged as it has been passed down from their ancestors while being willing to try new methods to communicate. Others prefer to change the message while preserving the methods as they have been inherited. A third school of thought maintains one should preserve both the message and the method. And finally, the fourth group is most comfortable changing both the message and the method.³⁹ In the end, however, these four categories may miss the real issue. As Erwin Raphael McManus points out: “The real issue facing the church is not essentially about methodology or even the preserving of the message; the real issue is why the church is so unaffected by the transforming presence of the living God.”⁴⁰

³⁷ Keith Hinton, *Growing Churches Singapore Style: Ministry in an Urban Context* (Singapore: Overseas Mission Fellowship, 1985), 160.

³⁸ Hinton, *Growing Churches Singapore Style*, 171.

³⁹ Leonard Sweet, “Introduction: Garden, Park, Glen, Meadow,” in *The Church in Emerging Culture: Five Perspectives*, ed. Leonard Sweet (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 20.

⁴⁰ Erwin. R. McManus, “The Global Intersection,” in *The Church in Emerging Culture*, 247.

Wise Administration and Accountability

The eighth characteristic is wise administration and accountability. “The healthy church utilizes appropriate facilities, equipment, and systems to provide maximum support for the growth and development of its ministries.”⁴¹

Networking Within the Body of Christ

Ninth is networking with the body of Christ. “The healthy church reaches out to others in the body of Christ for collaboration, resource sharing, learning opportunities, and united celebrations of worship.”⁴²

Stewardship and Generosity

Finally, the tenth characteristic offered by Macchia is stewardship and generosity. “The healthy church teaches its members that they are stewards of their God-given resources and challenges them to sacrificial generosity in sharing with others.”⁴³

Discipleship has to be intentional. It doesn’t happen naturally. Leaders in the church must do all they can to make disciples for Jesus Christ. But, for the most part, their role is to manage their God-given resources in a manner that will best “place people in the pathway of God’s transforming power”⁴⁴ and then fully trust in him to transform lives. What’s true for leaders of the church is true for parents in the family.

Healthy Families

Healthy churches create healthy disciples. However, Walter A. Henrichsen points out that many times,

Discipling is done at the price of neglecting those who need it most: our children! Discipling must begin with our children if it is ever to affect the rest of our

⁴¹ Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church*, Chap. 9.

⁴² Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church*, Chap. 10.

⁴³ Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Church*, Chap. 11.

⁴⁴ Geiger, Kelley and Nation, *Transformational Discipleship*, 58.

culture. Before we go looking for people to disciple, we should start with our own families. For a few short years God has entrusted our children to our care. Whether for good or bad, we will mark them for eternity.⁴⁵

Relational Learning

When considering the family as a life related, informal educational model, Sylvia Wilkey Collinson stresses that, “Both Jews and Christians acknowledge the importance of the parenting model of teaching as fundamental to the passage of faith from generation to generation (Deuteronomy 4:9, 5:16, 6:1-9, Ephesians 6:1-4). They use the parent-child relationship to describe the relationship between a believer and his or her God (Hosea 11:1, Galatians 4:6).”⁴⁶ The educational role of the family has existed since long before institutionalized learning. Compared to institutionalized learning the informal teaching methods of families “which arise naturally from a person’s environment, provide the means for satisfying innate curiosity and active participation, thus achieving more effective learning.”⁴⁷

Experience from one’s everyday life is at the center of transformation. That’s true whether the experiences are positive or negative. Jim Petersen observes that, “We all have experiences all the time, but few of us seem to benefit or learn from them. We can either be trained by the experiences of life, or they can leave us bruised and bewildered.”⁴⁸ For a child, the parents best accomplish the training from life’s experiences.

Parents and the wider family have an important role in nurturing the natural inclinations towards learning. They provide a secure, loving environment with appropriate stimulation, and a variety of opportunities for the child to use its

⁴⁵ Walter A. Henrichsen, *How to Disciple Your Children* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1981), 10-11.

⁴⁶ Sylvia Wilkey Collinson, *Making Disciples: The Significance of Jesus’ Educational Methods for Today’s Church* Eugene (OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 149.

⁴⁷ Collinson, *Making Disciples*, 148.

⁴⁸ Jim Petersen, *Church Without Walls* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1992), 195.

senses to explore the world, to be creative, and to gain experiences which will provoke thinking and the use of intellect. They encourage learning by praising, helping, advising and assisting in reflection on successes and failures. Thus, many of life's basic understandings, values, attitudes, social skills, behaviours, culture, language and numerous other concepts and skills are learnt and developed.⁴⁹

Heart Transformation

John and Susan Yates have asked themselves what it is that's most important in raising a child well equipped for life. They determined that, "It is not education, accomplishments, material possessions, health, or significance. It is character that will sustain a child, an adult, a family. As parents we want to raise confident children with a sense of destiny—kids who know who they are and where they are going."⁵⁰ Character refers to "the moral constitution of someone—the inner quality of an individual which issues in behavior, or what determines whether a person will behave in an honorable or a dishonorable way."⁵¹ To raise children with character takes intentionality, it does not happen automatically. They agree that character development is done best in the family during the "normal, daily events in our lives."⁵² They observe that, "By seeing, how to use everyday circumstances as opportunities for character development, we realize that often the big lessons in life are best learned in the little, everyday issues."⁵³ They identify "eight traits which are essential to becoming families of character: identity, a teachable spirit, self-discipline, compassion, a servant's heart, courage, faith, and joy."⁵⁴

While the Yates' refer to the process as character development, Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller refer to the process as heart change. However, when defining the heart

⁴⁹ Collinson, *Making Disciples*, 150.

⁵⁰ John and Susan Yates, *Character Matters!: Raising Kids with Values That Last* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1992), 2.

⁵¹ Yates, *Character Matters!*, 11.

⁵² Yates, *Character Matters!*, 3.

⁵³ Yates, *Character Matters!*, 3.

⁵⁴ Yates, *Character Matters!*, 14.

they include character development. They refer to the heart as the place “where longings grow, secrets are kept, plans are devised, commitments solidify, and character is developed. In short, the heart is a person’s center, the deepest spot in one’s life.”⁵⁵

Much of parenting is often perceived as behavior modification. Parents reward good behavior and punish bad behavior. This approach tends to work well for the short term but long-term effects are questionable. However, parenting for heart change is parenting for the future. “It’s like building a house of cards. No foundation and no depth mean the child’s whole life could fall apart at any moment. There’s much at stake in raising children. When we take a heart approach to parenting, we partner with God in raising a future generation.”⁵⁶

Heart change, as opposed to behavior modification, cannot be forced. It requires much planning and prayer. It starts with the heart of the parent.

As mentioned previously, the Yates’ have identified a teachable spirit as essential for a child to mature into a healthy adult. Turansky and Miller agree: “A teachable spirit keeps a heart flexible, willing to adjust to new data. Parental teaching provides more complex information regularly through instruction, correction, and limit-setting. As children absorb new information about life, their paradigms shift, and those changes contribute to a life-long growth process.”⁵⁷

With parents as their teachers, children often learn more from their parents than the parents realize. “They learn how to solve problems, face adversity, and handle life’s pressures. Parents teach them how to respond in relationships, show love, and set limits.

⁵⁵ Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller, *Parenting is Heart Work* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2006), 27.

⁵⁶ Turansky and Miller, *Parenting is Heart Work*, 15.

⁵⁷ Turansky and Miller, *Parenting is Heart Work*, 138.

They learn how to handle emotions, entertain themselves, and respond to disappointment.”⁵⁸ Turansky and Miller stress that this type of learning does not come from simply transferring information. Rather, this type learning comes from change within the child’s heart. It involves integrating the information into life. “It’s one thing to teach children’s minds and a completely different thing to teach their hearts. We all know having information in our heads doesn’t automatically enable us to apply it. Facts appear in our heads; beliefs appear in our hearts. Beliefs then feed commitments and result in behavior.”⁵⁹

For children to experience heart change, rather than behavior modification, requires intentionality from the parents. More than focusing on simply providing care for their children, parents must intentionally help their children learn principles that will equip them to make healthy decisions. “Principles focus on the heart. When children learn to make decisions for themselves, they’re doing the heart work necessary for growing up.”⁶⁰

Tedd Tripp’s alternative to viewing parenting as simply care-provider is to view parenting as shepherding a child’s heart on God’s behalf. God has called parents to function as his agents to direct their children in God’s ways:

Being a parent means working on God’s behalf to provide direction for your children. Directors are in charge. It involves knowing and helping them to understand God’s standard for children’s behavior. It means teaching them that they are sinners by nature. It includes pointing them to the mercy and grace of God shown in Christ’s life and death for sinners.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Turansky and Miller, *Parenting is Heart Work*, 139.

⁵⁹ Turansky and Miller, *Parenting is Heart Work*, 141.

⁶⁰ Turansky and Miller, *Parenting is Heart Work*, 144.

⁶¹ Tedd Tripp, *Shepherding a Child’s Heart* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd Press, 1995), 33.

According to Tripp, shepherding a child's heart encompasses six elements:⁶² (1)

Parents must be focused on life shaping influences that are under their control while helping their children develop a Godward orientation; (2) A child's behavior stems from their heart. Parents must work to help expose their child's heart struggles and help them understand that they were created for a relationship with God. Only he can truly satisfy the longings of their heart; (3) Parents help their children know themselves. This is accomplished by helping their children know God and the reality of the world. This shepherding is accomplished on God's behalf; (4) Parents must help their children comprehend what it means to live with the conviction that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever; (5) Parents raise their children using biblical methods; (6) Biblical methods include communication and the rod. Good communication helps parents know their children and the rod helps to underscore the importance of what is being taught.

Tripp acknowledges that, "The rod, as a form of discipline, is an idea that is unfashionable at present."⁶³ Many parents resist corporal punishment. Yet, he opines that God has ordained the rod to drive foolishness from the heart of a child. "It is a question of authority. Will the child live under the authority of God and therefore the authority of his parents, or under his own authority—driven by his wants and passions?"⁶⁴ He stresses that,

Use of the rod is not a matter of an angry parent venting his wrath upon a small, helpless child. The use of the rod signifies a faithful parent recognizing his child's dangerous state and employing a God-given remedy. The issue is not a parental

⁶² Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, 122-123.

⁶³ Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, 100.

⁶⁴ Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, 102.

insistence on being obeyed. The issue is the child's need to be rescued from death—the death that results from rebellion left unchallenged in the heart.⁶⁵

Tim Chester and Ed Moll agree with spanking a child. However, instead of considering it as a command from God,⁶⁶ they consider it an acceptable option for disciplining as well as other such actions as expressions of disapproval, isolation, letting children face the consequences of their actions, and removing privileges.⁶⁷

Spiritual Disciplines

The battle for a child's heart is a spiritual battle. "Our cultures are often more successful at developing children to be self-indulgent than at nurturing them in the pursuit of a spiritual life with God that gives meaning, purpose, and joy to life."⁶⁸ The mass media is effective in conveying the message that a full life consists in the accumulation of wealth and experiencing sensual pleasures. While Vernie Schorr Love agrees that "nothing is more influential or more detrimental in the spiritual life of children than the power of quiet example,"⁶⁹ she stresses that "we must add to our quiet example intentional activities that guide them in life with God"⁷⁰ in order to win the battle. And that is why guiding children to the practice of the spiritual disciplines is so important to help establish habits "that lead children to a deeper, intimate relationship and life with God."⁷¹

In practicing the spiritual disciplines as a family, Valerie E. Hess and Marti Watson Garlett caution parents:

⁶⁵ Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, 103.

⁶⁶ Tripp, *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, 105.

⁶⁷ Tim Chester and Ed Moll, *Gospel-Centered Family: Becoming the Parents God Wants You to Be* (Bloomington, IN: The Good Book Company, 2011), 42.

⁶⁸ Vernie Schorr Love, *Spiritual Disciplines for Children: A Guide to a Deeper Spiritual Life for You and Your Children* (Lafayette, CO: Character Choice, 2012), xii.

⁶⁹ Love, *Spiritual Disciplines for Children*, xii.

⁷⁰ Love, *Spiritual Disciplines for Children*, xiii.

⁷¹ Love, *Spiritual Disciplines for Children*, xiii.

Be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's leading so that you don't allow the spiritual disciplines to become "one more activity" in your family life—along with soccer, ballet, and piano lessons. If they lead to legalism or a "holier-than-thou" pride, discontinue their use immediately. We don't gain heavenly points for knowing how to "do" the disciplines correctly. As a parent, your job is to bring sanity to all aspects of family life so that walking the talk—or as Scripture puts it, seeking first the kingdom of God—can actually happen.⁷²

The spiritual disciplines should be introduced to children as early as possible recognizing that "we never master the spiritual disciplines; they are holy habits to last a lifetime."⁷³

Summary

This chapter has interacted with other scholars who have written about relevant issues related to establishing the importance of equipping parents to disciple their children. The first section of this chapter discussed the traits of a healthy church using Stephen Macchia's ten characteristics of a healthy church as a framework. The second section discussed more specifically traits that apply to healthy families and the discipleship of their children.

"The context for healthy discipleship is a healthy church. We grow most effectively in environments conducive to our development."⁷⁴ A healthy church environment is conducive to growing healthy families and a healthy family is conducive to growing children who will become healthy disciples. By adding *Aslam Academy* to the ministry of FCC, they are seeking to become more intentional in growing healthy families.

⁷² Valerie E. Hess and Marti Watson Garlett, *Habits of a Child's Heart: Raising Your Kids with the Spiritual Disciplines* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2004), 15.

⁷³ Hess and Garlett, *Habits of a Child's Heart*, 16.

⁷⁴ Macchia, *Becoming a Healthy Disciple*, 14.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROJECT DESIGN

Introduction

Chapter Four presents the project in four sections. First, the chapter will describe the purpose of the *Aslan Academy* program. Second, it will discuss the most significant planning considerations. Third, the chapter will detail the manner in which the program was executed. Lastly, it will articulate the process used, and outline the results and data collected to evaluate the program.

Purpose

The purposes of the *Aslan Academy* program are twofold: “(1) to address one of the most important needs in our families and churches today—for parents to understand the importance and urgency of beginning and sustaining the process of effectively discipling their children and (2) to provide an easy-to-use approach and a limited list of effective resources to begin that journey.”¹ It is designed for parents with children ages pre-kindergarten through teen, regardless of the children’s spiritual maturity level.

Planning

The *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* describes the program in detail. It is available in hard copy or it can be downloaded at www.cslewisinstitute.org/aslanacademy.

The program focuses on discipleship topics and parent preparation to include: reviewing the fundamentals of faith, understanding and encouraging heart change, developing character and faith that lasts, teaching the Bible to your children, introducing

¹ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 7.

spiritual disciplines to your children, helping children understand and explain their faith, family read-alouds for inspiration and discussion, listen and learn on their own, and monthly updates through the *Dawn Treader News*. The parents accomplish the self-paced program by utilizing the following seven-step plan: (1) Getting Started: Orientation and Overview, (2) A Good Foundation, (3) Moving Ahead, (4) Learning More About How God Made Your Child, (5) Sticky Faith and Teachable Moments, (6) Introducing Spiritual Disciplines, and (7) Understanding and Explaining Faith. The cost of materials is approximately \$200-250 per family per year and is covered by the church budget.

Each of the seven steps includes four different elements: (1) Prayer. This element focuses on praying with the children and soliciting others to pray for the family. (2) Read and Study. This element focuses on utilizing a variety of readings and Bible studies to equip the parents to disciple their children. (3) Apply. This element offers suggestions for applying what has been learned through reading and studying. (4) Family Activities. This element offers suggestions for family activities that will help to stimulate spiritual growth and strengthen family relationships.

Six components are interwoven throughout the program to include: (1) Reviewing the Fundamentals. For this first component, the focus is on the parents reviewing the fundamentals of the faith prior to discipling their children. (2) Understanding and Encouraging Heart Change. This component stresses the importance of heart change rather than behavior modification. (3) Developing Character and Faith That Lasts. Component three focuses on developing character traits that will provide a foundation for persevering in life's challenges. (4) Teaching the Bible to Your Children. This component emphasizes the importance of understanding God's love and his plan for

redemption as explained in the Bible. (5) Introducing Spiritual Disciplines to Your Children. This component focuses on age-appropriate disciplines to develop and practice their faith. (6) Helping Children Understand and Explain Their Faith. The last component focuses on helping children better understand their faith and become comfortable sharing their faith.

The Director of Family and Children's Ministries, this author and his wife, Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education at the University of Alaska Fairbanks form the leadership team for the *Aslan Academy* program.

Participation for this project was limited to no more than twelve families. It was limited by personal invitation to only families who had expressed a specific desire to disciple their children. Commitment for the project was for one year.

Parents will be required to read a variety of books. Following are the books used for the program. In some cases, parents will be asked to read only one of two choices:

1. *Basic Christianity*, Stott
2. *Christianity 101*, Bilezikian
3. *Parenting is Heart Work*, Turansky and Miller
4. *Shepherding a Child's Heart*, Tripp
5. *The Big Story: How the Bible Makes Sense out of Life*, Buzzard
6. *Gospel-Centered Family: Becoming the Parents God Wants You to Be*, Chester and Moll
7. *Character Matters: Raising Kids with Values That Last*, Yates
8. *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids*, Powell and Clark

9. *Habits of a Child's Heart: Raising Your Kids with the Spiritual Disciplines*, Hess and Garlett
10. *Spiritual Disciplines for Children: A Guide to a Deeper Spiritual Life for You and Your Children*, Love
11. *Faith Begins at Home: The Family Makeover with Christ at the Center*, Holmen

Monthly gatherings for the parents help encourage and equip them in their ministry to their children. The gatherings provided an environment to share ideas and exchange resources. Gatherings convened at 12:45 p.m. and were planned to end at 2:00 p.m. on the last Sunday of each month. FCC provided food and childcare. The desire was to keep everyone on the same step by focusing on the first step during the month of April. Subsequent to April, the families focused on the steps sequentially, one step every two months.

Execution

March 29, 2015

The first gathering was on March 29, 2015. Representatives from ten families attended. Each family introduced themselves. They shared their goals and concerns for accomplishing the program. The Aslan leadership team reviewed the *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook*. They highlighted the layout of the publication and how to use it. They clarified the purpose of the program and explained the schedule for working through the steps and how that related to the gatherings.

The next gathering was scheduled for April 26. The focus of the discussion would be Step One and the book, *The Big Story—How the Bible Makes Sense Out of Life*.

The focus for April was Step One as follows:

Step One: Getting Started on the Seven-Step Program²

Pray

1. Read “The Need for Covering Prayer” in the *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* “Reviewing the Fundamentals.” (Appendix 1)³
2. Start praying regularly for your family and your children.
3. Explain to your children that you will be praying for them each day and commit to praying with each child in the morning or evening of each day, in addition to regular mealtimes. Pray out loud for God’s guidance and a willing spirit in your child as you begin this program.

Read and Study

4. Read the introduction to the *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* and the section on “How to Use This Guidebook.” (Appendix 2)
5. Read the overview articles that describe the first few sections of the *Aslan Academy* curriculum:
 - a. “Introduction: Intentional Parenting to Disciple Our Children” (Appendix 3)
 - b. “Reviewing the Fundamentals” (Appendix 4)
 - c. “Understanding and Encouraging Heart Change” (Appendix 5)The program draws its name from
 - d. “Teaching the Bible to your Children” (Appendix 6)

² C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook*, 13.

³ The various articles and Bible studies references throughout the seven-step program are included in the appendices section as indicated for ease of reference.

6. Work through the Bible Studies for the following sections:
 - a. “God’s Plan for Parents” (Appendix 7)
 - b. “Understanding Heart Change” (Appendix 8)
 - c. “Teaching the Bible to Your Children” (Appendix 9)

Apply

7. Write down key lessons or questions from the articles and Bible studies. Make a list of the steps you are going to take to begin implementing what you have learned.
8. As described in “The Need for Covering Prayer,” start recruiting a prayer team. (Appendix 1)
9. Communicate regularly with your prayer team and share insights gained as you go through this program.

Family Activities

10. Choose an age-appropriate Bible for your child (from the resources under “Teaching the Bible to Your Children” in Appendix 9) and begin reading from it each day. Or, if the child is old enough, have the child read it on his or her own. Set aside time each day for a brief discussion of the reading.

April 26, 2015

The gathering on April 26 consisted of nine families. The discussion focused on Step One materials and *The Big Story—How the Bible Makes Sense Out of Life*.

The next gathering was scheduled as a picnic at Slater Park on May 31.

The focus for the months of May and June was Step Two as follows:

Step Two: A Good Foundation⁴

Pray

1. Continue praying with each of your children each day, asking God to guide your efforts and work in the hearts of your children.

Read and Study

2. Choose either *Basic Christianity* or *Christianity 101* under “Review of Fundamentals” (Appendix 10) and read it. Even if you are a long-time believer, it is helpful to review the fundamentals to help you as you begin to teach your child.
3. Read either *Parenting Is Heart Work* or *Shepherding a Child’s Heart* under “Understanding Heart Change.” (Appendix 11)

Apply

4. Consider “Issues to Ponder” in the “Review of Fundamentals” section of the *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook*. (Appendix 12)
5. Consider “Issues to ponder” in the “Understanding and Encouraging Heart Change” section of the *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook*. (Appendix 13)
6. Write down key lessons or questions from either *Basic Christianity* or *Christianity 101*. Make a list of the steps you are going to take to begin implementing what you have learned.
7. Write down key lessons or questions from either *Parenting Is Heart Work* or *Shepherding a Child’s Heart*. Make list of the steps you are going to take to begin implementing what you’ve learned.

⁴ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook*, 14.

Family Activities

8. Continue daily Bible study or readings from an age-appropriate Bible.

May 31, 2015

Representatives from nine families gathered at Slater Park for a picnic on May 31. The event included parents and children. It was a social to help the families become more acquainted with one another.

June 28, 2015

The gathering for June was cancelled due to dense forest fire smoke. The time to focus on Step Two was extended through July. This was to allow for discussion of the material during the July gathering before proceeding to Step Three.

July 26, 2015

One of the couples shared steps they have taken to read and pray with their girls each day. The husband shared highlights from *Shepherding a Child's Heart*. Six families attended.

The group discussed the possibility to meet more often than once per month. Most view the gatherings as vital support and indicated that they needed more frequent gatherings to help keep them on track. They requested that we meet twice per month. The Aslan leadership team agreed to discuss at a later date and consider the group's request.

The focus for the months of August and September was Step Three as follows:

Step Three: Moving Ahead⁵

Pray

1. Continue praying with each of your children each day, asking God to guide your efforts and work in the hearts of your children.

Read and Study

2. Read *The Big Story—How the Bible Makes Sense Out of Life*. After reading it, set aside time with your child to talk about how the Bible is one continuous story of God’s love and His desire to rescue us. Do this over several sessions, perhaps as a story before your child goes to bed.
3. Read *Gospel-Centered Family: Becoming the Parents God Wants You to Be*. Answer the questions under “Questions for Reflection” after each chapter. Write down the key insights you’ve gained from this book.

Apply

4. Discuss the “Issues to Ponder” from “Teaching the Bible to Your Children” section of the *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook*. (Appendix 14)
5. Write down additional issues or thoughts you have from the resources you’ve completed so far.
6. At unhurried mealtimes, use the “Aslan Moments” (from the *Dawn Treader News*) to guide a discussion each week on key topics. The *Dawn Treader News* can be found on the website at www.cslewisinstitute.org/aslanacademy.
7. Write down a description of your children’s faith, their attitudes and their behavior. Discuss your possible parenting short-comings from the past and begin

⁵ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook*, 15.

implementing one or two specific changes based on what you've learned from the resources read so far. Be sure to do a specific plan for each child.

Family Activities

8. Continue daily Bible study or readings from an age-appropriate Bible.

Provide some of the "Listen and Learn" resources to your child and allow your child to listen on his or her own or use for car rides and have the whole family listen together.

(Appendix 15) Ask your child about the stories and have him or her describe what he or she is learning.

August 30, 2015

Nine families attended. The group viewed and then discussed the video "The Story." Then they discussed "Issues to Ponder for Heart Change" in *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook*, Appendix 13.

The leadership team announced that gatherings would convene twice per month per the group's request starting September 13.

September 13, 2015

Representatives from six families attended. The discussion focused on Parts 1-2 of *Gospel-Centered Family*. Leadership split the gathering into two groups: male and female. This allowed for much more conversation from the guys than previously experienced.

September 27, 2015

Five families attended. The Aslan leadership team led a discussion of *Gospel-Centered Family*, Parts 3-4. Separating the males and females into different groups worked well the last gathering so the group agreed to make that the standard practice.

Focus for the months of October and November was Step Four as follows:

Step Four: Learning More about How God Made Your Child⁶

Pray

1. Continue praying with each of your children each day, asking God to guide your efforts and work in the hearts of your children.

Read and Study

2. Read the *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* overview article: “Developing Character and Faith That Lasts.” (Appendix 16)
3. Work through the Bible study: “Developing Character and Faith That Will Last.” (Appendix 17)
4. Read Section 1 and 2 of *Raising Kids to Love Jesus*. Write down the unique characteristics of each of your children. Write down your understanding of your child’s personality type. Pray for God’s wisdom as you learn how to parent each child, based on the child’s uniqueness.
5. Read the first five chapters of *Character Matters! Raising Kids with Character That Lasts*. Answer the questions at the end of each chapter. Write down your assessment of each of your children’s character under each category listed in the chapters.

Apply

6. Consider the “Issues to Ponder” from the *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* section on “Developing Character and Faith That Lasts.” (Appendix 18)

⁶ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook*, 16.

7. From your notes about each child's personality type, write down two or three parenting changes you will make based on this new knowledge and commit to implementing those changes.
8. From your assessment about your child's character, plan one or two specific steps you will take to begin shaping your child's character in these areas.

Family Activities

9. Continue daily Bible study or readings from an age-appropriate Bible.
10. Plan a special outing with each child to lovingly talk about the positive aspects of what you've observed about that child's personality and character. Praise him or her and celebrate how God has made him or her unique. Reinforce God's love for the child and how He wants to know him or her. Read relevant sections of the Bible to highlight how God wants to shape us to become the person He wants us to be.

Begin family readings, starting with *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Use the guide *Aslan in Our World: A Companion to the Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* to ask key questions throughout. Look for ways to encourage your children to think and to envision themselves in similar situations.

October 11, 2015

Representatives from seven families attended this gathering. The Aslan leadership led the families through a self-assessment using the following guide:⁷

⁷ This self-assessment guide was created by AnneMarie Mattacchione, Assistant Professor, Early Childhood Education, University of Alaska Fairbanks Community and Technical College.

How regularly do you pray for your family and children?

1. Daily
2. Almost Daily
3. 2-3 Times each week
4. Once a Week
5. This is a step I have not implemented

When do you pray for your family and children?

1. Morning
2. Evening
3. Mealtimes
4. This is a step I have not implemented

How do you pray for your family and children?

1. Privately
2. Out loud in front of my children
3. This is a step I have not implemented

What do you pray for your family and children?

1. Basic needs
2. God's guidance and a willing spirit in my child to follow the *Aslan* program
3. This is a step I have not implemented

How regularly do you pray with your children?

1. Daily
2. Almost Daily
3. 2-3 Times each week
4. Once a Week
5. This is a step I have not implemented

When do you pray with your children?

1. Morning
2. Evening
3. Mealtimes
4. This is a step I have not implemented

How do you pray with your children?

1. Out loud
2. Out loud taking turns with my children
3. This is a step I have not implemented

What do you pray with your children?

1. Basic needs
2. God guiding my efforts and work in the hearts of my children
3. This is a step I have not implemented

How often have you read and studied the articles?

1. All the time
2. Most of the time
3. Sometime
4. This is a step I have not implemented

How often have you read and completed the Bible studies?

1. All the time
2. Most of the time
3. Sometime
4. This is a step I have not implemented

How many of the books have you completed?

1. All
2. Most
3. Some
4. This is a step I have not implemented

How often are you and your children reading together from an age-appropriate Bible?

1. Daily
2. Almost Daily
3. 2-3 Times each week
4. Once a Week
5. This is a step I have not implemented

How often are you discussing the content of the Bible reading with your children?

1. Daily
2. Almost Daily
3. 2-3 Times each week
4. Once a Week
5. This is a step I have not implemented

How often are you using the “Listen and Learn” resources with your children?

1. Daily
2. Almost Daily
3. 2-3 Times each week
4. Once a Week
5. This is a step I have not implemented

How often are you asking your child about the stories from the “Listen and Learn” resources?

1. Daily
2. Almost Daily
3. 2-3 Times each week
4. Once a Week
5. This is a step I have not implemented

I have a plan to implement what I have learned from the books, articles and Bible studies?

1. Yes
2. For some items
3. This is a step I have not implemented

Do you have a prayer team?

1. Yes
2. This is a step I have not implemented

How often do you update your prayer team about specific prayers as you learn more about your children's needs?

1. Weekly
2. 2-3 times a month
3. Monthly
4. This is a step I have not implemented

Have you used the *Dawn Treader News* as a guide for discussion with your family each week?

1. Yes
2. 2-3 times a month
3. Monthly
4. This is a step I have not implemented

Have you written down a description of your children' faith, their attitude and their behavior? Have you adjusted your parenting shortcomings based on what you've learned from the resources read so far?

1. Yes
2. This is a step I have not implemented

Evaluation

Process

On October 25, 2015, representatives from six families gathered as a focus group at FCC and provided feedback to help evaluate the effectiveness of the *Aslan Academy* program. The moderator was from FCC but not involved in the program. A professional court reporter audio recorded the proceedings electronically and then provided this author with a transcript. The group functioned anonymously. Each family received a number and all communications were conducted using only their family number. Nobody from the Aslan leadership team attended the discussion.

The questions were divided into three groups: general questions, questions regarding the curriculum, and questions regarding the process.⁸

General Questions

What are your general thoughts about *Aslan Academy* with regards to how it is, or is not, helping you disciple your children?

One parent commented, "It gave me a direction to start. And I had no idea where to start that, you know, so it -- just having something to pick up every day and a small task to accomplish, like reading from the children's bible of the material we were given,

⁸ Unless otherwise noted, the focus group questions were created by the author.

was very, very helpful for me. It opened a lot of conversations in my family.”⁹ A different family expressed the importance of the gatherings. “I would say for me, what I’ve enjoyed in this whole process the most is the times where you guys -- we just fellowship and pray and (indiscernible) community involved in, you know, realizing the struggles of our children together. It’s priceless.”

If you were inviting a friend to participate in the *Aslan Academy* program, what would you say in the invitation?¹⁰

One family would invite others by stressing that the *Aslan Academy* program gave them direction. “For me, it would be inviting them to find those stepping stones, because without this, we were kind of lost as to which way to go, but this gave us the stepping stones in order to do that.” Then they would conclude by encouraging families that they do not have to feel alone. “We thought we were the only ones struggling with stuff.” Similarly, family two would stress the importance of having a purposeful direction. “I think as far as my invitation would go, it will be about a purposeful direction and really being able to critically think about, you know, raising your children in a Godly manner.” Family one would focus on the influence of the culture. ”If I was sending out the invitation myself, it would be along the lines of, if you’re concerned about what your child is being exposed to at school and in the world, but yet, you want to raise them up differently, this would be a good vehicle to use.”

⁹ Unless otherwise noted, all quotations cited in response to the individual questions are from participating parents in a focus group conducted in Fairbanks on October 25, 2015. All responses were confidential; the names of the parents are withheld by mutual agreement.

¹⁰ Richard A. Krueger, “Designing and Conducting Focus Group Interviews,” University of Minnesota, October 2002, 8, accessed October 23, 2015, <http://www.eiu.edu/ihec/Krueger-FocusGroupInterviews.pdf>.

Suppose you were in charge and could make one change that would make the program better. What would you do?¹¹

Multiple persons mentioned the timing of starting the program. The following parent's comment reflects the group's consensus:

I -- personally, I would have given us the books at the very end of the school year and just talked to parents about -- because there was some heavy reading for some of us. And summers are crazy up here and it -- for me, personally, it was hard to meet. I don't like to commit to anything during the summer, but I could have committed to just reading those books. And I think for me, personally, if it would have been like, okay, here's the books and you need to have this all read, and we're going to start at the beginning of the school year -- because when you have young kids, that's kind of what my life revolves around is school, so. . .

One family commented on a previously made change concerning the frequency of gatherings. "For myself, personally, the one thing that I would change, we already did change. We went from meeting once a month to meeting twice a month, which, for me, has been huge in keeping my family on track."

Family Six echoed a similar comment from another family. "I would say that the curriculum feels like it's very much geared towards the perfect family. And often, I'd -- we'd typically go and feel like, it didn't apply to me in like a lot of ways, and so that was kind of a thing."

Curriculum Questions

With regards to the *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook*, what are you satisfied with about how this book has equipped you to disciple your children? What are you dissatisfied with?

Family Six thought the questions were thought provoking but felt like they weren't able to fully appreciate them due to the amount of material to be covered.

¹¹ Krueger, "Designing and Conducting Focus Group Interviews," 8.

I liked the questions that they asked periodically. Every once in awhile, you would come across like a sheet of questions, and I liked that. I wished maybe that it was broken down into weeks that I could answer just a couple questions like every week, instead of just answer this whole chunk all at one time and not really know when to stop -- start and stop.

I didn't really -- I kind of hesitate to say this. But I didn't really love the articles, just -- not because they weren't well written or they didn't have good information, but because I'm already reading a book that's, like, a lot. And so here I'm reading this book and then I go to the workbook and I'm reading more articles. And it's like, oh, my goodness, it's overload.

Family One agreed that the questions were thought provoking.

It was a little disconcerting to hit all those questions at once. Well -- so in the regards of -- I am satisfied with it, because it does have -- referenced excellent books to read as background material, so there is a plus for that. And it does give thought-provoking questions, you know, which may not quite pertain to the younger kids, but being parents of teenagers (indiscernible).

The Prayer Element stresses how to pray with your child and to build a prayer team to pray for you and your family as you begin the *Aslan Academy* program. With regards to the Prayer element, what are you satisfied with about how this has equipped you to disciple your children? What are you dissatisfied with?

Having the element of prayer in each step has been a positive influence for the families. Family Five shared that, "Being constantly reminded about prayer has got us praying more." Family Six agreed that it was a great reminder to pray. "I would say when I'm asking people to pray for my kids and I think of a specific need, it puts it in my mind as well, to like actually really say it, and it reminds me to be praying as well for that thing instead of just going, oh, this is so frustrating, and then letting it go."

It always feels like there should be more of a structure to the program that -- it kind of feels -- and I know that it's -- I don't really know. But it kind of feels like our gatherings are almost an afterthought of *Aslan* in the way that it's structured as a program. Like, I feel like the workbooks should be tied into us getting involved together as well, not just our families. But if -- as I was more tied into the fellowship part of what we do together, and almost, you know, inviting us or having it be, like, if you're going to sign up for this, we're going to be committing

to really leaning on each other through this. And I know we have been in a sense, but like really solidifying that. I don't know. Just adding more of the emphasis of the group as well in the midst of all this stuff.

Articles, Bible studies, and books are offered to provide parents with a foundational knowledge of the elements necessary for your child's spiritual growth. With regards to the articles, Bible studies, and books, what are you satisfied with about how these have equipped you to disciple your children? What are you dissatisfied with?

This family's comment accurately reflects several other families' responses to this question.

It's been -- the books have been helpful to me to keep constant, the understanding that my children's change is going to come through my growth as a parent and my understanding of their hearts. It's my children's -- my children aren't just going to be awesome rock star children because I'm in the As -- you know, because I'm in the *Aslan* program. It's -- I have to actually read it, understand it, and implement it to make my children great kids. . . But some of those books in the very beginning were weighty. There was a lot of meat to those books. To have to get through *Christianity 101* in a month was insane. Like, I didn't do anything but read that book. It was a wonderful book and I'm glad I took it on. That is something that I would have liked to have been able to take three months or even six months to work my way through it. And, in fact, I do plan on going back and rereading it, because I feel like it's going to help me grow in my faith a lot.

The Apply Element helps you understand how to put what you are learning into practice, with suggestions for each step along the way (for instance the “Issues to Ponder” articles or suggestions from the Dawn Treader News). With regards to the Apply element, what are you satisfied with about how this has equipped you to disciple your children? What are you dissatisfied with?

The one comment for this question expressed concern that the Apply Element did not seem to be relevant to older children:

The application parts were almost non-relevant for teenagers. I mean, it just didn't seem to have anything that I could really implement. I tried the very first one and that didn't go over real well. The Lion, Witch, and Wardrobe thingy with my 12-

year old just didn't go over. So I kind of just had to give up on the application things that just didn't seem to be relevant for older kids.

The Family Activities Element helps you understand how to help your family develop habits and regular activities that will contribute to spiritual growth. With regards to the Family Activities Element, what are you satisfied with about how this has equipped you to disciple your children? What are you dissatisfied with?

Similar to the previous question concerning the Apply Element, this question received little discussion. One family commented that they did not find the Family Activities Element to be beneficial. "It felt kind of stale and almost generic to a degree where I didn't even know what I'm supposed to be doing with my kids once we get to the -- I mean, I don't know. It's just like -- I mean, it's -- obviously, we need wisdom and stuff, but it just felt like it was sort of stale, if that's a (indiscernible) word."

Process Questions

With regards to the gatherings, what are you satisfied with about how they have equipped you to disciple your children? What are you dissatisfied with?

The group agreed that the fellowship and conversation associated with the gatherings were extremely valuable for their growth. Some found the fellowship and conversation to be more valuable than the reading:

I think I get more from the conversations that we've had versus reading something in the book, because you just -- again, it -- you're not the only one in that struggle, and you're not the only one who's trying to figure out how to facilitate time, how to keep the attention of the kids, and still do everything else that comes with running a household, whether you have one kid, three kids, ten -- whatever you have, it can get really chaotic. And everybody is in a different level in their understanding of this, so that experience from those who are way experienced to us who don't have a lot of experience and can bring a new perspective to it, seems to make a big difference. And taking back to twice a month versus once a month made a big difference as well. I don't know if, at some point, adding children to it as well to kind of bounce stuff off, really, as a -- not

as an every-time thing, but maybe a planned activity type thing with the families based on something here. Because, yes, I like being (indiscernible) on this. Kids can get to be much. That's it.

Another family member emphasized the importance of conversation:

I'm a -- I think and I gain so much when I hear and when I communicate. So just having that auditory perspective to learning, I think is absolutely priceless for people that do not grasp things when reading. I mean, I've had to force myself to learn, obviously, because I'm going to school online. But, like, I remember every single thing we talk about in this room. And it helps me just to be focused and what I gain from personal -- something I can look at and I can say, that works for you. It immediately clicks for me; I go, I'm going to try it. Because there's almost like this testimony that comes with it where it's beyond just words on a page. You can put a face to it and it just works it out. So, to me, the group is -- it's priceless just because that's the format of how I learn. You know, it's the makeup of my thoughts and how I receive information.

One person considered the gatherings to be the best part of the *Aslan Academy* program. "I would just agree that -- I would say that this is the best part of *Aslan* is just being able to meet with each other, and just be supportive and pray for each other and -- yeah, it's like our parent support group."

Family One was dissatisfied with the lack of direction offered during the gatherings:

For me, I'm kind of one of these -- I like direction, so if each week was, here's specifically what we're tasked to do, it would make it much easier than me trying to figure out what I'm supposed to be tasked to do. And that's just -- I mean, I am not teacher material. I'm not -- I can't plan. You tell me what I'm supposed to do and I can do it. I'm a good worker bee, not a good leader bee. I don't want to be a leader bee. So if the -- if each time we came we were given a specific task or specific segment or here's your paper, take it home, fill it out, bring it back, that kind of thing. I know that's a lot of work on the leaders to do that, but that would have helped me out more for that. I'm just (indiscernible - simultaneous speech).

Similar to Family One, this family expected that the gathering discussions would be more closely related to the readings:

In the beginning of the program, I was under the impression that we were going to be mainly working off of the work material when we met. And when we didn't do

that, I did go through a period where I was frustrated about it. I kind of had this impression of, you know, I'm reading the material, I'm doing the answers, and I know I'm doing it for myself. But I thought that we were going to be discussing it more as a group, and it was frustrating to me. But, actually, after hearing what everybody just said about fellowship and how it's more happening organically, I don't think that I'm bothered by that anymore.

Lastly, another family reinforced the need for more direction from the leadership.

"If there's not clear directive of what we need to accomplish, it will be the last thing on my mind to accomplish, because I have things that are very clearly marked out that I have to finish and I'm going to hit those first, because it's not vague, so. . ."

With regards to the leadership team, what are you satisfied with about how they have helped equip you to disciple your children? What are you dissatisfied with?

Some were glad with simply having a group for parents. "I was just glad that somebody is doing this. It started -- that it gave us somewhere to start and meet, because you could sit and think, oh, it would be great for a bunch of parents to get together, but to actually get us all together is pretty amazing."

Agreeing with the previous comment, another family added their appreciation for ending the gatherings on time. "Kind of on that same thing they're, also, very cognizant of the fact that we all have busy lives. And so they tend to keep those meetings on track. We don't run over. They've got that pretty well tuned."

The following comment regarding the time of year the program started summarizes the comments made by the majority of other members:

I think the time of the year that we started the program was odd. I don't know that like any thought went into just -- you know, just why -- what -- why we started when we did. That would be interesting to know for me. Because I think we were all just getting our footing when summer vacation started and then -- and this is no fault of theirs, but there was that scheduling fiasco in June, July. And it would have -- I think if we had all -- if we were all -- if we would have started it another time of year, we all would have been on more solid ground when summer

vacation started.

Some folks were not clear of the commitment at the beginning of the program and suggested that an informational meeting would have been helpful.

I think an informational meeting prior to people signing up, because that -- I struggled with a question of the invitation. I mean, what would I tell someone. It's like you got no idea what you're looking at here. So (indiscernible - simultaneous speech) an informational meeting as to, you know, what your level of commitment, your time, because maybe it's not a good time to try and actually do this, if you know that you have to read this many books or do this many things or, you know, meet twice per month. It -- people would know what they might be getting into.

The purpose of this focus group has been to evaluate the *Aslan Academy* program as an effective tool for equipping parents of Friends Community Church to disciple their children. Have we missed anything?

For this final question, some of the families expressed a sincere concern to help other families with what they have learned through the *Aslan Academy* program. One family was considering how they might facilitate a group:

I kind of hope that with going through this, is that my thought was, that, at some point, I want to be able to help facilitate a group of people that do this. And so I personally don't like it when you -- for me, to be like, oh, this is wrong and that's wrong and that's wrong. Well, great. What are you going to do to fix it? So I think that for me, myself, that while it's still fresh in my brain right now, before the end of the school year comes and then everything is nuts of -- for me to sit down and write down, okay, if I was going to facilitate a group, how would I want to do it? While I'm thinking right now, you know, what was my hindrances in this to be able to -- because I don't think that I have the right to just take this knowledge that I've gained in this and just hold it in my family, for me personally. I'm like, okay, this is great. Now, I want to be able to go and help empower some other parents and be like, you are not alone, because that's a huge sanctuary in there and I think people can feel really alone.

Another family agreed and recognized the value of offering the program to the whole congregation:

Okay. I was just going to say, I agree, and I think that knowing that we're kind of

the guinea pigs for this, that if, you know, the powers that be, whoever they may be, that they look at this. And I think that the concept of the *Aslan Academy* is a really good concept. I think that -- and I think he mentioned it, too. This is kind of -- we're one of the first churches even going through this. So hopefully like -- and they're interested in our feedback, so hopefully this will -- the things that we've said will kind of help refine it so that we can facilitate it church-wide and take what we learned out of it and the good things -- aspects of it, and maybe ditch the stuff that we don't need, and then apply it as fit this particular church where we're at, where our families are at and be able to use it.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the project in four sections. First, the chapter described the two-fold purpose of the *Aslan Academy* program to stress the importance and urgency for parents to disciple their children, and to provide parents with tools to help accomplish the task. Second, it discussed the most significant planning considerations. Third, Chapter Four detailed the manner in which the program was executed by summarizing the different gatherings. Lastly, it articulated the focus group process used to evaluate the *Aslan Academy* program, and outlined the results and data collected as a result of the evaluation.

CHAPTER FIVE

OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSION

Introduction

Chapter five presents the outcomes and conclusion in four sections. In the first section, the findings from the focus group will be summarized. The findings will be categorized according to those that were positive and those that indicated a need for improvement. The second section will discuss actions as a result of the project. Those actions accomplished immediately and those actions delayed until the 2016-2017 session will be discussed. The third section will evaluate the project. The final section will discuss the conclusion and implications of the thesis question.

Findings Summary

After reviewing the data from the focus group, the Aslan leadership team compiled the significant findings concerning two different aspects of the program. First, they considered the positive findings of the program. The participants expressed appreciation to FCC for offering a tool to help them begin the discipleship of their children. *Aslan Academy* helped them focus and be intentional about raising their children in a Godly manner. Parents were concerned about what their children were being exposed to at school and in the world, and struggled with how to raise them differently. They were consoled to find others struggling with the same dilemma and acknowledged that *Aslan Academy* was a good tool for helping them work through the struggle.

The parents appreciated two changes made to the gatherings shortly after the beginning of the program. Firstly, they applauded the change to create separate breakouts for male and female participants. Secondly, they praised the change when leadership

increased the number of gatherings from one per month to two per month. Parents adamantly stressed the importance of the gatherings over other elements of the program. The connectedness and accountability experienced at the gatherings were invaluable. For those parents whose primary learning method was auditory, the discussions in the gatherings were indispensable for their comprehension of the material.

The readings provided thought-provoking questions. They helped parents reflect on their personal spiritual condition and understand how their child's growth is related to their own personal growth. They appreciated the number of good references for outside reading.

Parents were satisfied with the Aslan leadership. They appreciated that the meetings didn't run over the allotted time. The use of social media helped with communications between the parents and the leadership. The members of the leadership team demonstrated a heart for families. The parents were encouraged that someone was willing to help them disciple their children.

Some parents wanted to insure that *Aslan Academy* would be offered to other families within the congregation and expressed interest in wanting to help other families with the lessons they had learned from the program.

Second, the Aslan leadership team considered the findings where parents indicated a need for improvement. While parents indicated that the different reading assignments were stimulating and contained valuable information, the volume of reading was overwhelming for the majority. Additionally, they considered the *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* confusing. Some of the parents were disappointed that the reading materials did not acknowledge the single parent and tended to be geared towards what

one might consider the “perfect family.” Some parents had difficulty managing the large volume of material and requested the leadership’s assistance to plan their studying time. One family commented that Family Activities Element seemed rather stale and generic.

The parents commented that the gatherings seemed like an afterthought. They requested them to be more intentional and coordinated with the assigned readings. Additionally, they recommended that specific assignments for each gathering be communicated at the previous gathering.

The program timing was crucial to the parents. They unanimously requested the program be run in conjunction with the school year, preferably October through May.

Many parents expressed that they were unclear of their commitment at the start of the program. They suggested that an informational meeting prior to sign-up would have been helpful. Some parents were unclear as to what to expect to happen when the program finished. One suggestion was to have a graduation ceremony to highlight the accomplishments of the participants.

Even though parents were grateful to be reminded of the importance of a prayer support team, a few parents were uncomfortable asking others outside the group to pray for their family while they were involved in the *Aslan Academy*. They felt it was too huge a responsibility to ask someone to assume.

Actions as a Result of the Project

The Aslan leadership prioritized the top four positive findings. They wanted to insure that they continued to intentionally stress and focus on these areas. First, *Aslan Academy* helped parents begin discipleship of their children, and to maintain their focus and intentionality on the process. Second, the program emphasized the importance of

prayer. Third, the program helped them realize their need for personal growth. Fourth, the gatherings' frequency and format are important. Meeting twice per month with separate breakouts for the males and females is crucial for effective crosstalk and for allowing for an effective environment for connecting with one another.

When considering areas that were identified as needing improvement, the Aslan leadership selected four top findings that required action to make the *Aslan Academy* an effective tool for equipping parents at FCC to disciple their children. First, the volume of reading needs to be adjusted to a more reasonable level. Second, the confusion experienced using the *Parents Guidebook* must be addressed. Leadership agreed to spend more time at the gatherings articulating the important items within the *Parents Guidebook* for each step. Third, while increasing the number of gatherings to twice per month and incorporating separate breakouts for male and female greatly increased the effectiveness of the gatherings, more thought needs to be put into the direction and structure of the gatherings. Fourth, parents unanimously requested the program be timed to coincide with the school year.

After considering the recommended changes to the program, Aslan leadership immediately changed items where able. The remaining items would be incorporated later into the proposed program schedule for 2016-2017. One change incorporated immediately was to specify which readings would be discussed in the gatherings and to consider all other readings as optional. Closely associated with that change, a specific question from the assigned reading was assigned for each gathering to enhance reading and to serve as the focus for discussion in the breakouts. These two changes will be incorporated as the remainder of the *Aslan Academy* for 2015-2016 is executed as

follows:

January 2016

Step Five: Sticky Faith and Teachable Moments¹

Pray

1. Continue praying with each of your children each day, asking God to guide your efforts and work in the hearts of your children.

Read and Study

2. Purchase the *Hide 'em in Your Heart* CD (preschool and early elementary) or one of the *Seeds Family Worship* CDs (older elementary and middle school) and play it as you drive around town or allow the child to listen in his or her room. These songs will help you and your child easily memorize key Bible verses.
3. Read *Sticky Faith* to gain insight into what helps children develop and keep a strong faith into adulthood. Complete the discussion questions at the end of each chapter.
4. Read either *The Power of Teachable Moments* or *Faith begins at Home*.

Apply

5. From your reading of *Sticky Faith*, write down your assessment of how your parenting approach so far will lead to a “sticky faith.” What changes did you see that would be helpful? Commit to implementing at least one change this month.
6. From your reading of either *The Power of Teachable Moments* or *Faith Begins at Home*, write down three specific changes you and your spouse will make to begin

¹ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 17.

creating teachable moments with your children. Commit to do them starting this month.

7. At unhurried mealtimes, begin using the “Aslan Moments” (from the *Dawn Treader News*, the *Aslan Academy* monthly update) to guide a discussion each week on key topics.

Family Activities

8. Continue daily Bible study or readings from an age-appropriate Bible.
9. Plan a special outing with each child to continue discussing character. Think of an event or activity to illustrate an opportunity for growth.
10. Continue family readings as well as encouraging your child to listen and learn on their own. Once you have finished reading *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, continue reading through the *Chronicles of Narnia* with the study guides. Every family is different, and accordingly should adapt the schedule of reading to suit the interests and time availability of family members. Try to read a chapter, two or three times per week. If you don’t have time to go over all the questions in one sitting, discuss them over the next couple of days, keeping the story fresh in the children’s minds and building their excitement to read the next chapter.

Pray

Continue updating your prayer team and seek specific prayers as you learn more about your child’s needs.

February 2016

Step Six: Introducing Spiritual Disciplines²

Pray

1. Continue praying with each of your children each day, asking God to guide your efforts and work in the hearts of your children.

Read and Study

2. Continue daily Bible study or readings from an age-appropriate Bible.
3. Read the *Aslan Academy Guidebook* article on “Introducing Spiritual Disciplines to Your Children.” (Appendix 19)
4. Work through the Bible study “Introducing Spiritual Disciplines to Your Children.” (Appendix 20)
5. Read either *Habits of a Child’s Heart: Raising Your Kids with the Spiritual Disciplines* or *Spiritual Disciplines for Children, A Guide to a Deeper Spiritual Life for You and Your Children* under the section on “Spiritual Disciplines.”
6. Read chapters 6-10 in *Character Matters! Raising Kids with Character That Lasts*. Answer the questions at the end of each chapter.

Apply

7. At unhurried mealtimes, pick one of the spiritual disciplines and discuss why it is important and how it might be adopted in your family. As a family, seek to have everyone take an initial step toward following that discipline in an age-appropriate manner. Discuss it regularly as you implement it.

² C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook*, 18.

8. From your reading in *Character Matters!* Continue your assessment of each child's character under each category listed in the chapters. Plan one or two specific steps you will take to begin shaping your child's character in these areas.

Family Activities

9. Continue special outings (perhaps an outing to serve together) with each child or together to continue discussing character and seeking an event or activity to illustrate an opportunity for growth.

Continue family readings using the *Aslan Academy* suggested resources as well as encouraging your child to listen and learn on their own. Find time to discuss what they are reading and hearing.

March 2016

Step Seven: Understanding and Explaining Faith³

Pray

1. Continue praying with each of your children each day, asking God to guide your efforts and work in the hearts of your children.

Read and Study

2. Continue daily Bible study or readings from an age-appropriate Bible.
3. Read the *Aslan Academy* article “Helping Children Understand and Explain Their Faith.” (Appendix 21)
4. Work through the Bible study “Understanding and Explaining Your Faith.” (Appendix 22)

³ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook*, 19.

5. Choose the age-appropriate resource under “Helping Children Understand and Explain Their Faith.” (Appendix 23) Begin working through the questions with your child. Take the time to discuss and seek additional resources for help if necessary. Help your child feel comfortable asking tough questions, and, as a parent commit to finding satisfactory answers through *Aslan Academy* or other resources, your pastor, or children’s director at church. Work through the questions at a comfortable pace. This process may take weeks or months.

Apply

6. Consider the “Issues to Ponder” from the *Aslan Academy Guidebook* section on “Helping Children Understand and Explain Their Faith.” (Appendix 24)
7. Read the article on “Is My Child a Follower of Jesus?” (Appendix 25) Think about where your child is in terms of his or her understanding of God and salvation. If your child is ready, begin the discussion of what it means to be saved and how your child can place faith in Jesus Christ. If your child has already professed faith, review these key elements and engage your child in the discussion to discern his or her understanding.
8. From the resources under “Helping Children Understand and Explain Their Faith,” (Appendix 23) pick one question to raise at unhurried mealtimes and engage your family in the discussion. Parents should do research before asking the question in order to guide the discussion. Continue this practice from time to time going forward.

Family Activities

9. Continue special outings with each child to continue discussing character and seeking an event or activity to illustrate an opportunity for growth.
10. Continue family readings as well as encouraging your child to listen and learn on his or her own. Find time to discuss what your child is reading and hearing.

Pray

Continue updating your prayer team and seek specific prayers as you learn more about your child's needs.

The proposed program schedule for 2016-2017 will continue to include those immediate changes made for the remainder of the 2015-2016 schedule shown above. Additionally, in order to alleviate the pressure of the volume of reading, the Aslan leadership decided on three actions. First, they decided to make the reading list available to the participants in the summer prior to starting the program in September 2016. This will allow parents to begin the reading before the gatherings start. Second, leadership will highlight the option of audiobooks, when available. Third, they decided to reduce the required reading list for 2016-2017 from the original. While all the books on the original list proved to be quality material, the Aslan leadership thought it best to reduce the number of books to seven with one book to be read per step. The leadership conferred with the participating parents to choose the books.

From the focus group discussion, several parents voiced concern that the "curriculum feels like it's very much geared towards the perfect family." The intent of *Aslan Academy* at FCC is to equip all parents. Therefore, during the informational meeting in May 2017, the Aslan leadership will acknowledge the concern voiced by the

focus group participants and clearly emphasize that *Aslan Academy* is for all parents.

Also, the proposed schedule allows time at the beginning of the program to clarify the participants' commitment as well as the importance and purpose of the gatherings. The schedule designates time for instruction and encouragement for setting family goals. It is structured to align with the local school year. The proposed program schedule for 2016-2017 is as follows:

2016

May: Informational meeting

22: Discuss *Aslan Academy* purpose, structure, and commitment. Begin sign-ups.

September: *Aslan Academy* introduction and set family goals

11: Introduction to *Aslan Academy* program and setting family goals/mission.

25: Setting Family goals/mission (continued).

October: Step One

9: *Parenting is Heart Work*, Turansky and Miller, Parts 1 and 2.

23: *Parenting is Heart Work*, Turansky and Miller, Parts 3 and 4.

November: Step Two

13: *The Big Story*, Buzzard, Chapters 1-4.

27: *The Big Story*, Buzzard, Chapters 5-8.

December: Step Three

11: *Gospel-Centered Family: Becoming the Parents God Wants You to Be*,

Chester and Moll, Parts 1 and 2.

18: *Gospel-Centered Family: Becoming the Parents God Wants You to Be*,

Chester and Moll, Parts 3 and 4.

2017

January: Step Four

8: *Character Matters: Raising Kids with Values That Last*, Yates, Chapters 1-5.

22: *Character Matters: Raising Kids with Values That Last*, Yates, Chapters 6-10.

February: Step Five

12: *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids*, Powell and Clark, Chapters 1-4.

26: *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids*, Powell and Clark, Chapters 5-8.

March: Step Six

12: *Habits of a Child's Heart: Raising Your Kids with the Spiritual Disciplines*, Hess and Garlett, Chapters 1-6.

26: *Habits of a Child's Heart: Raising Your Kids with the Spiritual Disciplines*, Hess and Garlett, Chapters 7-12.

April: Step Seven

9: *Faith Begins at Home: The Family Makeover with Christ at the Center*, Holmen.

23: Bible Study “Understanding and Explaining Your Faith,” *The Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook*, pages 85-86.

May: Transition and focus group

7: “Ongoing Intentionality,” *The Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook*, pages 20-21.

21: Focus Group.

To encourage summer reading, the following reading list will be distributed to the parents at the informational meeting on May 22, 2016:

1. *Parenting is Heart Work*, Turansky and Miller
2. *The Big Story: How the Bible Makes Sense out of Life*, Buzzard
3. *Gospel-Centered Family: Becoming the Parents God Wants You to Be*, Chester and Moll
4. *Character Matters: Raising Kids with Values That Last*, Yates
5. *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids*, Powell and Clark
6. *Habits of a Child's Heart: Raising Your Kids with the Spiritual Disciplines*, Hess and Garlett
7. *Faith Begins at Home: The Family Makeover with Christ at the Center*, Holmen

In order to clarify the parents' commitment to the gatherings, their commitment to prayer and the Aslan leaders' commitment to the group, the following list of assumptions will be distributed and a signed copy will be collected from each interested parent at the informational meeting on May 22, 2016:

Gatherings

1. Attend all gatherings except in case of emergencies.
2. Assignments will be accomplished prior to the gathering. Others are counting on your participation and sharing. We all learn from each other. Our spaces are limited and valuable. Someone signed-up yet not

fully participating could be preventing someone else from attending.

Prayer

3. Participants will pray for one another's families during the week on a regular basis. Others are counting on your prayer support.

Leadership

4. All the above
5. Provides for a safe (confidential, gracious) environment
6. Provides direction

I AM/WE ARE IN!

Name _____

E-Mail _____

Text _____

Project Evaluation

This thesis-project has explored the biblical and theological principles that are foundational to establishing the importance of equipping parents to disciple their children. It highlighted God's global plan to redeem all nations. Then it articulated the pivotal role that the family plays in God's plan. The family is where children are nourished in the faith and the fundamentals of following Christ are passed from generation to generation.

It surveyed other scholars who have written about relevant issues related to establishing the importance of equipping parents to disciple their children. It discussed the traits of a healthy church and then, more specifically, traits that apply to healthy families and the discipleship of their children. A healthy church environment is

conducive to growing healthy families and healthy families are conducive to growing children who will become healthy disciples.

This project assumed:

1. Most parents have never received intentional discipleship training.

Therefore, most have never been trained to study the Bible on their own, most have values different from the Kingdom of God, most have a poor prayer life, and most know little about spiritual warfare.

2. Parents often do not intentionally disciple their children because they feel unprepared or do not know where to start.
3. Setting priorities and time management are issues for most.

With these foundations and assumptions established, the purpose of this thesis-project was to evaluate the effectiveness of *Aslan Academy* to equip parents to disciple their children.

The thesis question posed was as follows: Is the *Aslan Academy* program an effective tool for equipping parents of FCC to disciple their children? To answer the question, this author considered focus group inputs, gatherings' discussions, and private conversations with the participants. Based on the data, this author affirms that the *Aslan Academy* is an effective tool for equipping parents at FCC to disciple their children with the adjustments noted in the "Actions as a Result of the Project" Section above.

Conclusion/Implications of the Thesis Question

This project has been a positive experience for the participants, FCC, and this author. Comments such as "I think that the concept of the *Aslan Academy* is a really good concept," "I want to be able to go and help empower some other parents," and "I was

just glad that somebody is doing this. It started -- that it gave us somewhere to start and meet, because you could sit and think, oh, it would be great for a bunch of parents to get together, but to actually get us all together is pretty amazing," demonstrate the impact *Aslan Academy* had on some of the participants. One of the participants with both older children out of the home and younger elementary-aged children in the home considered the program to be eye opening. In a private conversation with this author, he questioned, "Why didn't I know this before now?" Other comments articulate the affect *Aslan Academy* had on the parents' personal growth: "I would just agree that -- I would say that this is the best part of *Aslan* is just being able to meet with each other, and just be supportive and pray for each other and -- yeah, it's like our parent support group," and "It's been -- the books have been helpful to me to keep constant, the understanding that my children's change is going to come through my growth as a parent and my understanding of their hearts." Another parent said, "It gave me a direction to start. And I had no idea where to start that, you know, so it -- just having something to pick up every day and a small task to accomplish, like reading from the children's bible of the material we were given, was very, very helpful for me. It opened a lot of conversations in my family." Additionally, as the program has trained parents to lead within their homes, it has helped respond to a need that FCC identified in CHAT of not having leadership training. It is noteworthy that of the eight families who finished the initial program, three families signed-up to participate for a second year and one family volunteered to become co-leaders.

The program has served as a good source for identifying those who may desire to go deeper in their personal walk with Christ. As a result of relationships nurtured in the

Aslan Academy, two participants have become involved in intentional discipleship groups.

FCC is in the early stages of transitioning from its seeker-friendly culture to becoming an intentional disciple-making community. This project has served as a great vehicle to reinforce the need for a more robust disciple-making effort, not only with the children but, more broadly, with the adults as well. There is a growing sense within the community of people wanting more from their relationship with God but not knowing how to do that. This project has helped the FCC leadership team to better understand the wisdom of Henrichsen's statement that "discipling must begin with our children if it is ever to affect the rest of our culture."⁴ Now, the challenges are to integrate *Aslan Academy* into FCC's culture and to train Aslan leadership for growth while maintaining integrity of the program as it continues.

This author has shared feedback from the project with the CS Lewis Institute President and as requested, plans to share a copy of this work with him. Additionally, he has consulted with another church in North Carolina to assist them in starting *Aslan Academy*. This author's commitment to God's plan for reaching the nations through making disciples within the local church has been strengthened. He possessed a strong desire to help discipleship flourish within the local church prior to this project. However, God has used this research to change his heart and given him compassion for parents to be equipped to disciple their children, an area previously overlooked by him. It helped him to understand more completely the beauty of God's plan to have worshippers from all nations and how that begins in the home.

⁴ Walter A. Henrichsen, *How to Disciple your Children* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1981), 10.

APPENDIX 1¹

THE NEED FOR COVERING PRAYER

As you begin the *Aslan Academy* program, it is important to start praying regularly for your family as a whole and for your children specifically. Find time each morning and each evening to have uninterrupted time with God as you commit to discipling your children.

- Praise God for blessing you with a child or children.
- Ask God to give you wisdom to fulfill your role as a parent.
- Ask God to reveal any hindrances to your faith as you begin the process of discipling your children. Confess any hindrances and ask God for strength to work in you to eliminate those hindrances.
- If you are married, ask God to strengthen your marriage and give both of you a shared, godly vision for discipling your children.
- Ask God to work in the hearts of each of your children, to give them a sense of God's character and His power and His glory.
- Ask God to work in the hearts of your children to give them a spirit of obedience to His commands and to your authority as a parent.
- Ask God to remove the obstacles you may be facing regarding your relationship with your children. Ask for a desire to spend time together and to communicate honestly.

¹ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 35-36.

- Praise God for the work He has already done in your life and in the life of your children. Spend time meditating on how God has been involved in your lives.
- Offer to God yourself and your children, to be taught by Him and used by Him for His glory.
- Pray for specific wisdom to better understand the challenges that each child is facing and will face. Pray that God will give you a discerning spirit to guide you day by day in your relationship with your child.
- Pray for perseverance, as the world will seek to distract you from being intentional about discipling your children.
- Pray for protection from Satan, who would love to keep your child from following Jesus.

Recruit a Prayer Team

Ask a group of people you know to join you in praying regularly for you and your family as you begin this journey. Find spiritually mature people in your church, your family, your neighborhood, or among your friends to specifically pray for you and for each child over the coming year. Feel free to share suggestions for prayer possibly in addition to the suggestions above. Send reminders by e-mail and include specific requests as they come up.

Your prayer team is very important to keep you from discouragement and to give you regular encouragement. When you are tired or down, your prayer team can lift you up. Let your child know that others are praying for him or her on a daily basis.

You may find that as you contact people to pray for your children, they may begin a similar process with their children. Invite your prayer team for dinner or regular celebrations during the life of your child. Let your child be encouraged by their prayer warriors, supporting them as they grow into a fully committed disciple of Jesus!

APPENDIX 2¹

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDEBOOK: THE PURPOSE OF THE *ASLAN ACADEMY*

PROGRAM

The *Aslan Academy* program is designed (1) to address one of the most important needs in our families and churches today—for parents to understand the importance and urgency of beginning and sustaining the process of effectively discipling their children and (2) to provide an easy-to-use approach and a limited list of effective resources to begin that journey.

Parents face many pressures and complications in raising children today, and there is no shortage of books, articles, programs or plans to help them be effective parents. The problem for many parents is to know where to start.

At the *Aslan Academy*, we've tried to make this a much simpler process, providing parents with a limited number of highly effective books, articles, Bible studies and thoughtful questions to get on a path where discipleship can take place.

We provide parents a recommended **Seven Step Plan**, where each step builds on the previous step. These steps are to be completed at a pace comfortable for an individual family. Each step integrates a variety of elements including:

Prayer—how to pray with your child and to build a prayer team to pray for you and your family as you begin the *Aslan Academy* program.

Read & Study—learning from a combination of short articles, Bible studies, and a limited selection of highly effective books to provide parents a foundational knowledge of the elements necessary for your child's spiritual growth.

¹ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 7-9.

Apply—how to put what you are learning into practice, with suggestions for each step along the way.

Family Activities—how to help your family develop habits and regular activities that will contribute to spiritual growth.

The components listed below are incorporated in the Seven Step Plan, sequenced to build on the previous step. Here is a brief description of each component:

Reviewing the Fundamentals. Whether you are a new or long-time believer, it is important to review the fundamentals of the Christian faith before beginning the process of discipling your child.

Understanding and Encouraging Heart Change. Rather than simply seeking behavior modification, it is important to understand that long-term change comes through authentic heart change, driven by the Holy Spirit.

Developing Character and Faith at Lasts. Learning important character traits can assist in deepening faith and will provide a foundation that will help your child persevere through challenges.

Teaching the Bible to Your Children. Children (and parents) need to understand (1) how the Bible is one amazing story of God's love and (2) His plan for redemption. God's Word is essential in helping your children know, love, and understand God's plan in their lives.

Introducing Spiritual Disciplines to Your Children. For centuries believers have developed helpful practices to help them grow in their faith. Parents can use these same disciplines, applied in an age-appropriate manner, to help their child develop and practice a deep faith.

Helping Children Understand and Explain their Faith. Significant numbers of children leave their faith when challenged in high school, college, or as young adults. Children must be equipped to truly understand what they believe, be prepared to explain and defend their beliefs, and be comfortable sharing that faith with others.

We also offer additional resources to inspire and encourage families as they read together, and resources for children to read or listen to on their own.

This program requires the reading of a variety of books, usually 1 to 2 books in each section, over the course of the Seven Step Plan, which may take anywhere from six months to a year. The complete resource list is in a separate section, but please note that in many cases parents are asked to read only one of two or three choices; there is no need to purchase all the books to get started. We recommend that parents eventually go back and read all the resources, but it is not necessary up front.

In the on-line version of the *Aslan Academy* you will find links to each of these resources at Amazon.com, which offers parents the choice of new, used, or Kindle versions of the books. Even families on a very tight budget should be able to gain access to these books at a reasonable cost. Most of the books are available on a variety of other websites (e.g., CBD, Cokesbury) and in many bookstores. Parents might also check their local libraries or their church library.

The other resources—Bible studies, short articles, issues to ponder, etc.—are included in this guidebook and are available on the *Aslan Academy* website at www.cslewisinstitute.org/aslanacademy

For married couples, the program will have the greatest effect if both parents “buy in” and participate fully in the Seven Step Plan. If only one spouse will be carrying the

load, or if you are unmarried, seek a godly adult friend or relative to help you as you seek to disciple your child. Perhaps seek a group of single parents in your church who might simultaneously participate in the *Aslan Academy* program to provide prayer support and a sounding board as you seek to lead your child to know and love our Lord. Whether you are married or single, God loves you and your family and wants you to know Him better and grow in faith.

Discipling your child will take time. While the *Aslan Academy* has been designed to work for busy parents, it is important to do some necessary “cleaning out” of schedules before beginning. The program calls for short morning or evening times with your child, for longer discussions at meal- time or other times, and time for occasional activities. In addition, each step in the *Aslan Academy* program asks parents to complete a Bible study, read short articles and one or two books. Last, and perhaps most important, blocking out time to pray for your child and for your efforts to disciple your child is absolutely essential.

Few parents look back and say they wished they had spent less time with their children. Finding time now, even in the midst of busy work, school, and sports activities, is important. If your children’s spiritual growth is a priority in your family, that priority has to be reflected in the time allocated to it. Similarly, if you want your children to grow, they must have time in their schedules. Make sure your children are not already overburdened with other activities. Again, if spiritual growth is a priority, it must not be reflected only in your schedule, but also in your children’s schedules.

The *Aslan Academy* Seven Step Plan provides a simple, consistent approach that will lead you through the foundational elements of the program and help you develop

daily habits with your child. Read over the full list of resources, and choose the resources you will need for the first two steps (carefully noting that often you are given a choice between two resource options). Order the books so you will have them as you complete each step. Be sure to order additional resources in time for later steps. Other than the first step, which should take two to four weeks, the other steps will take four to eight weeks.

APPENDIX 3¹

INTRODUCTION: INTENTIONAL PARENTING TO DISCIPLE OUR CHILDREN

Why do young people walk away from their faith when they leave home? Key reasons include their lack of strong faith as a child and their parents not having lived a vibrant faith. Parents tend to focus, almost by default, on raising kids who will exhibit good behavior, succeed in school and eventually in employment, and become decent citizens. If they accomplish this, most feel, they have parented well.

While these are important outcomes, they are not the most important. What do I desire most for my children? For them to grow in the knowledge and love of their Savior Jesus Christ and articulate, defend, and joyfully live out their faith in whatever calling God has for them. Helping disciple our children on this journey should be a parent's urgent priority. Deuteronomy 6:5–8 tells us that we are to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and strength, and commit wholeheartedly to God's commands. We are to repeat these commands again and again to our children when we are home, on the road, when going to bed and getting up.

Proverbs 22:6 notes that we parents are to train our children in the way they should go, and when they are old they will not turn from it. The Bible is clear that parents are chiefly responsible for helping their children become effective disciples. The church can help. Youth groups can help. Godly friends can help. But parents are on the front line, and they need help.

¹ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 3-5.

Parents deal with so many seemingly urgent and important things—managing their jobs, helping kids with school, taking them to sports, music, or play practices, church activities, hobbies, vacations . . . At times, just surviving the daily grind can seem like an impossible goal.

But if we fail to intentionally prepare the hearts of our children to fall in love with the Creator of the universe and find joy in following Him, our work as parents will fall dreadfully short of God’s plan for us to lead our children. Likewise, as a church, if we neglect the work of equipping parents to disciple their children, we have forfeited a foundational responsibility.

Recent studies from a variety of reputable sources have confirmed that parents, in general, are not properly preparing children to have a solid faith. Here are just a few summary comments:

“Not surprisingly, homes modeling lukewarm faith do not create enduring faith in children. Homes modeling vibrant faith do. So these young adults are leaving something they never had a good grasp of in the first place. This is not a crisis of faith, *per se*, but of parenting.”²

“The drop-out problem is, at its core, a faith-development problem; to use religious language, it’s a disciple-making problem. The church is not adequately preparing the next generation to follow Christ faithfully in a rapidly changing culture.”³

² Focus on the Family Findings, “Millennial Faith Participation and Retention,” http://www.focusonthefamily.com/about_us/focus-findings/religion-and-culture/~/media/images/about-us/focus-findings/FF%20-%20Millennial%20Faith%20Retention%20FINAL.ashx, August 2013, 4.

³ David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 21.

If parents have a vibrant, strong faith and model that faith for their children, it is much more likely for those children to develop a similar vibrant, strong faith that is maintained throughout their lives.

The culture of a typical middle school, high school, or university seems almost designed to pull children away from their faith. With the plethora of information on the web and through influential messages on TV, movies, music, and other entertainment options, it is more important now than ever for parents to help children fully understand and defend their beliefs. The world is intentional about worldliness. Parents need to be intentional about discipling their children.

Unfortunately, churches are not, and cannot, fulfill the role of discipling our children. Even churches that make this a priority will get a small percentage of a child's time during the year. Without a parent being fully engaged, a child is likely to be pulled away in the general cultural tide. To help address this urgent need for discipling our children, the C.S. Lewis Institute has created the *Aslan Academy*, a new program designed to help parents understand the need for—and to provide access to—quality resources to begin and sustain the discipleship process with their children.

There are thousands of available books and other resources—many being helpful, many misguided or even harmful—on the subject of raising godly children. Sorting through the options can be a daunting challenge. At the *Aslan Academy*, we've identified a small number of highly effective resources to help struggling parents begin this exciting journey of discipleship with their children. And each month, through our new *Dawn Treader News*, we will highlight additional resources and provide helpful ideas for the upcoming weeks.

The *Aslan Academy* fills part of our larger vision of developing effective discipleship resources for people at each key stage of life. So much of a person's worldview and so many opinions are set before the teenage years, making it crucial for parents to recognize the urgent importance of shaping their child's spiritual growth. As parents, we can't guarantee our children's salvation, but we can prepare their characters and model a vibrant faith that can capture their imaginations and understanding.

For parents who have not been actively discipling their children, don't worry. It is never too late to start.

The *Aslan Academy* program will help you get started no matter where you are in this process.

The program features a biblical overview of the *Aslan Academy* approach and essential parent preparation, including the following:

- Reviewing the Fundamentals of Faith
- Understanding and Encouraging Heart Change
- Developing Character and Faith that Lasts
- Teaching the Bible to Your Children
- Introducing Spiritual Disciplines to Your Children
- Helping Children Understand and Explain their Faith
- Family Read-A-louds for Inspiration and Discussion
- Listen and Learn on their Own
- Monthly updates through the Dawn Treader News, with further resources to equip and challenge parents and children

To best use the resources of the *Aslan Academy*, we've produced the Seven Step Plan to guide parents on this journey. Each step is broken down in categories that include: Pray, Read & Study, Apply, and Family Activities. Parents can work through these steps at a pace appropriate for their family.

In addition, we've also launched *Aslan Academy* Gatherings, designed to build a community of parents within a church body who will commit to proactively discipling their children. These regular gatherings are a place to share ideas, exchange resources, pray for families, and encourage one another. Children today are seeking authenticity in their lives and most desire to be challenged. Developing a community of parents who share a real commitment to discipleship can not only dramatically improve their children's lives, but also change the overall culture of the church. These gathering can be led by children's directors on church staffs or by committed parents within churches or in small groups. C.S. Lewis knew the importance of helping children learn and grow in their faith. Lewis's Narnia series has proven to be one of the most enduring and helpful tools for children to see insights into God's story. These stories are included in the *Aslan Academy* reading recommendations, as well as discussion guides that will help parents reinforce Lewis's core messages.

Lewis's example helps us extend our reach beyond our own children. He spent countless hours responding to letters from children,⁴ and his care and love for these children—most whom he never even met—can inspire us as we focus on being intentional with our own children and with others in our extended families, our churches,

⁴ C.S Lewis, *Letters to Children*, ed. Lyle W. Dorsett and Marjorie Lamp Mead (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985).

or our neighborhoods. Toward the end of his life he wrote to a child, “If you continue to love Jesus, nothing much can go wrong with you, and I hope you may always do so.”⁵

For parents, or grandparents who can play the role, the process of discipling their children should be one of excitement and joy, helping their children come to understand God’s nature, His plan for us, and His power to help us live bold, fruitful lives. To walk with a child and help that child learn to love God and then see that love unfold for many years is something we all want to experience. No matter where you are in that process, we believe the *Aslan Academy* can equip and encourage you to be more effective in that journey.

⁵ C.S. Lewis, *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis*, vol. 3 (San Francisco: Harper, 2007), 1474.

APPENDIX 4¹

REVIEWING THE FUNDAMENTALS (ARTICLE)

It is quite common for people to assume they have a deep understanding of the Bible. We have learned, however, that even those who have been in church their whole lives, been in small groups, and in other learning environments, often have significant gaps in their understanding of basic biblical concepts.

Surveys of self-identified “born again” believers tell us that there are widely divergent views of salvation, the Trinity, Jesus’ incarnation and resurrection, and issues of heaven and hell. Particularly in the West, there is a temptation to pick and choose the doctrines we want to believe and then either set aside or disagree with the more challenging doctrines.

As a parent in charge of discipling your child, you need to understand that it is essential that you take the time to learn biblical truth, and to pass that truth on to your child.

In the *Aslan Academy Review of Fundamentals*, we offer two options for covering the essential doctrines of the church. We encourage each parent to read either *Basic Christianity* by John Stott or *Christianity 101* by Gilbert Bilezikian and Bill Hybels. Either of these short books will provide a clear understanding of the core beliefs of the church. Over time, parents should seek to read both and use them to refer back to address questions that come up.

Second, we offer a short, easy-to-understand book, *The Big Story: How the Bible Makes Sense Out of Life* by Justin Buzzard, which describes how the Bible is one

¹ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 29-30.

continuous story of God's plan to rescue us from sin. It clearly explains how the Bible is a narrative of God's love playing out over the entire history of the universe and is not simply a collection of disjoined books that describe how we should live.

While written for younger children, we believe *The Jesus Storybook Bible* is a wonderful companion book for adults. *The Jesus Storybook Bible* clearly describes how the Bible fits together, with Jesus as the overall focus. Parents will gain much insight as they read along with their children.

Parents should certainly care about their child's salvation, but what this means is often difficult to explain to children. For some parents, once the child "prays the sinner's prayer" they might consider their job done. But in reality it is more complex than that. We offer guidance on how parents should think about conversion and also how to look for clues that true conversion has taken place. And once a child is truly converted, the discipleship work is just beginning.

God wants each of us to grow in spiritual maturity and to offer our bodies (and our lives) as "living sacrifices"² learning what is good and acceptable to God. And we are called to be filled with the Holy Spirit and to be fruitful, living as effective disciples of Jesus. Conversion is the beginning of this exciting journey, not the end.

Although you may be tempted to "jump right in" with the other steps in the *Aslan Academy* program, please take the time to review the fundamentals and to pray that God will grant you wisdom as you seek to know God's truth and communicate that truth effectively to your children.

² Romans 12:1-2.

APPENDIX 5¹

UNDERSTANDING AND ENCOURAGING HEART CHANGE (ARTICLE)

The Bible talks about God removing our heart of stone and replacing it with a heart of flesh.² In Psalm 51:10, the psalmist writes, “Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (NIV).

When we become believers in Christ, the Holy Spirit comes to live in us—in our hearts—and through the Holy Spirit we become new creatures. “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”³

When we become new creatures, our hearts are changed to where our desires are inclined toward the Lord and our desires are less focused on increasingly distant selfish, worldly things.

You have probably seen someone who was transformed so completely that you could scarcely believe he or she was the same person you once knew. I have a friend who, in his youth, joined a terrorist organization, was filled with hate, and sought to harm and even murder those he considered the “enemy.” This foul-mouthed, re-breathing hatemonger is now a mild-mannered, soft-spoken, godly discipler of men. God changed him; in particular, God changed his heart. I’d known him for a year or two when someone told me about his past; I simply could not believe it. There is no way, I thought, that the person I knew could act the way he was described. The Bible is full of examples of heart change. Saul (renamed Paul) is a perfect example alongside my friend. Paul went from being filled with zealous hatred toward Christians to becoming the most successful

¹ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 43-45.

² Ezekiel 36:26.

³ 2 Corinthians 5:17.

missionary of all time. Jesus changed Paul's heart, and all of Paul's natural gifts and skills were combined with God's anointing to turn him into one of the most important and successful men who ever lived.

For parents, it is easy to lose heart when we watch our children show such selfishness and often anger at any moment they think something is "not fair" toward them. They can hit, bite, and bully other kids and fight against their parents' authority. Through careful application of discipline, this behavior can often be controlled, but then parents can be surprised at how often it returns in certain circumstances.

There is a difference between compelling a certain behavior through consistent discipline and seeing behavior changed due to a new motivation of the heart. The first may allow a parent accompanying a child to rest easy in public; the second will allow for a lifetime of growth guided by the Holy Spirit.

Our children do need to understand and respect authority—the authority of God and the authority of their parents. But as parents we are called to use our authority not just to require good behavior, but to point our children to the ultimate authority, God. We are called to nurture their love and understanding of God and His plan for their lives. We are called to help them develop a godly character that will help them become more and more like Jesus as they grow up. We are called to surround our children with godly examples, while we prepare them for challenging situations.

In short, we are called as parents to equip our children for the most important decision they will ever make: will they trust Jesus Christ for their salvation and surrender their lives for God to work through them in whatever role God has planned for them.

Many parents think that if they can lead their child to say “the sinner’s prayer” their work is done. With children, it is never easy to know how sincere they are or whether they fully understand the implications. Our job is to help our children grow in their understanding and to continue to equip them, encourage them, challenge them, and, in particular, show them by example how to become devoted followers of Jesus.

Every child is different. God has made each child unique, and He has a purpose for each child. As parents, we must be willing to take the time to understand how God has “wired” each child and to help the child develop God-given gifts and become a person of great character. As a child’s heart begins to change, parents will see areas that require deeper engagement to encourage continued growth and learning.

In today’s society, it is common for parents to expend an enormous amount of energy and resources on developing their child’s academic skills, considering the right schools and the best universities. Likewise, many parents of children with athletic ability provide significant opportunities to maximize their potential. Another parent might notice a great musical passion and help that child fully develop that gift.

While these may be worthwhile pursuits, what will be accomplished if our child becomes successful by the world’s standards but has a faulty character or is living outside of God’s desire? A quick look at the entertainment industry or many of our sports “idols” will demonstrate the heartache and devastation that can be caused by worldly success outside of God’s provision.

While it is God who is ultimately responsible for changing the hearts of our children, as parents we can do our part to prepare our children for God’s work to be

complete. Another way to say it is that God will light the re, but we can pile up lots of kindling so the re can burn bright!

When we see a child whose heart has truly been changed, and we see how that child begins to love God and then live out that love by the way he or she treats family, friends, and those in need, it is a beautiful sight. That child becomes teachable in so many ways and will accept our authority as parents because he or she respects God's authority personally.

More important, that child will grow up, perhaps go to college, and begin a career with God as guide, able to discern God's will, and resist the worldly pressures that can lead to destruction.

As you work through the resources in this section on heart change, pray that your child's heart be changed, but also that your heart will continue to change. Pray that God will empower you with wisdom and grace to be a godly example for your child.

APPENDIX 6¹

TEACHING THE BIBLE TO YOUR CHILDREN (ARTICLE)

“Study the Scriptures diligently,” Christ said in John 5:39, “these are the very scriptures that testify about me.” (NIV)

Every historical narrative, every prophecy, every law, every theological argument contained in the Bible is a link in the chain of God’s development of His plan of salvation for humanity. The Bible is the whole story—God’s story and message for humanity.

Someone who was asked to give only one reason for why he or she believes the Bible is the whole Truth might reply, “Because it is the only book that accurately describes reality and how to deal with it.” In philosophy classes in universities, philosophies are taught, often quite logically and neatly, but they can be pushed into self-contradiction. Not one of these innumerable systems for “living wisely” is in fact liveable. The Bible, and Christianity, is. Even non-Christians cannot help admitting that the Golden Rule is infallibly honorable, that forgiveness somehow leads to the most perfect exercise of justice, and that the central gospel truth of Christ’s sacrifice has changed the world as nothing else ever has or could. The complexity of human life—the tangle of sins and emotions and desires and relationships—is only fully explained and dealt with by the Bible. There is nothing more important to teach our children as we prepare them to deal with life in this world.

And the Bible itself is clear that it is the responsibility of parents to teach their children the Scriptures. “Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”²

¹ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 63-64.

This Biblical mandate also describes the most effective method for fulfilling the duty it commands parents to undertake. The best way to teach children about the Bible is to talk about it. Bring up connections between the passages you have read and the issues the world or your family is currently facing. Answer the questions the children ask and ask them some yourself. You might be surprised by the ready grasp children have of spiritual truths. You might find that they figure out with astonishing understanding the meaning of a passage of Scripture that has puzzled you and many other adults.

It can also be helpful to set aside some time for memorizing Bible verses with your children. Committing scriptural passages to memory is the most certain way to ensure access to their guidance in every crucial experience in life. Often the moments that require us to make the most serious decisions occur at times when we may not have a Bible ready to hand. So choosing Scriptures for our children to commit to memory is a meaningful and practical task. Requiring our children to put effort into memorizing Scripture like they would into training for a favorite sport, or learning a leading part in a play, or studying for the SAT, reinforces for them just how important the Bible is and how much a deep and intellectually instructed knowledge of God's Word is necessary in their life.

But precisely because biblical knowledge is necessary for life—true, genuine, eternal life—we must impress on our children the importance of living it out. Children will not make a connection with past occurrences and moral principles unless they see the import they have for their daily life. When reading the Bible with our children, we must show them not only how all the biblical stories connect to form one cohesive narrative of God's salvation, but also how this salvation has changed our lives. Children tend to

² Deuteronomy 6:7, NIV.

imitate what their parents do rather than merely act on what they have said. To grow in godly grace and provide a genuine example to their children of what a life lived according to the Bible should look like, parents must spend time in the Word themselves, over and above family devotions with their children.

As your children grow in the Word, they will be transformed by it. It is a wonderful thing to be raised in the Word from the time one is very young; one's habits of thinking and desiring are then shaped in accordance with biblical truths rather than cultural influences. Only the Bible can truly make us realize the way God intended we should live, being "transformed by the renewing of our minds."³ And this transformation leads to the greatest joy one can possibly have: living a real, godly, fulfilled life. We all want something beyond the false, insufficient realities offered to us in the mundane concerns and aims of worldly societies and functions. And the Bible shows us the way to enjoy life to the fullest, life as God really created it to be. If we desire the best for our children, we can do nothing better for them than to raise them with a full appreciation and ever-increasing understanding of the Bible.

³ See Romans 12:2.

APPENDIX 7¹

GOD'S PLAN FOR PARENTS (BIBLE STUDY)

God calls each of us to a clear purpose: to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. God made this clear to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 6:4–9. Jesus also reiterated this when asked which commandment was the greatest. God, not our children, should be the center of our lives. If our hearts are set on following the Lord, we have taken the first step toward properly raising our children.

As parents, God has given us authority over our children. But we are to exercise that authority with the same love, grace, and discipline that God exercises over us, always recognizing that our children are watching us and are keenly aware of discrepancies between what we teach and what we do. Living out our faith in an authentic, vibrant way is an integral part of teaching our faith to our children.

By participating in the *Aslan Academy*, you are taking the first step toward following God's command. Commit to praying for God's help as you prepare how you will teach and model God's Word and His commands to your children.

1. Read the following verses from the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 6:4–5; Leviticus 19:18) and from the New Testament (Matthew 22:34–40). What two key commands does God make?
2. According to the above verses, what should be the center of your life? What might that look like in your daily life?
3. If your children look closely at your life, how do you think they would describe your life's primary focus? Ask their opinions.

¹ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 37-39.

4. Review how you spend your time and your money. See how that matches with how God is calling us to live?

5. Write down specific areas of your life that you believe are hindering your ability to love God and love your neighbor. Commit to praying regularly for God's help to refocus your life.

6. Read Psalm 127. How does God describe children? How do you see your children as a blessing?

7. Read Matthew 18:10–14. How important is it to God that each of these “little ones” come to know Him? How does that change your thinking as a parent?

8. Read Deuteronomy 6:4–9. After giving His command to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and strength, what else does God say to do?

9. Read Deuteronomy 5:16 and Ephesians 6:1–3. What does God command children to do?

10. Read the next verse in the Ephesians passage (v. 4) and Colossians 3:21. Reflecting on these verses and the passage in Deuteronomy 6:7, what role and responsibility is God giving to parents? Why do you think God is giving parents such authority over their children?

11. How is God making clear that He expects parents to show grace toward their children?

12. God expects children to submit to parents' authority. Jesus is the perfect example with His obedience to the Father (Philippians 2:5–8). Children must be taught to submit to their parents' authority; this involves discipline, done with love. Read the following passages (Proverbs 23:24; Proverbs 23:13; Proverbs 29:15; 2 Timothy 4:1–2;

and review Ephesians 6:4 and Colossians 3:21). There are widely divergent views from parenting experts on proper discipline. Based on these verses, how would you describe an appropriate plan and limits for disciplining your children?

13. God loves us unconditionally and will never leave us (Romans 5:8; Ephesians 1:4–5; Hebrews 13:5). Read the story of the prodigal (Luke 15:11–32). What does this story tell us about how we are to love our children?

14. No matter what you teach your children, they will notice your example. Are you living by what you are teaching your children? If not, list below some of the inconsistencies and repent and commit to seriously addressing these issues.

15. In what ways are you setting a godly example for your children? List some of them and thank God for His grace and goodness. Pray that He'll continue to strengthen and empower you to disciple your children. After all, He chose you to be their parents, so He will equip you for what you need.

APPENDIX 8¹

UNDERSTANDING AND ENCOURAGING HEART CHANGE (BIBLE STUDY)

The Bible mentions the heart more than 750 times, primarily to describe our will—our ability and desire to do things, to make and carry out choices. The heart, in this context, essentially describes who we are.

This is not the version of ourselves that we show to the world; it is instead the true self that God sees. “People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”²

The natural state of our hearts is sinful or “deceitful,”³ but God wants to change our hearts, and He is willing to do so for those who seek Him. God will change our hearts in a variety of ways, and for those whose hearts are changed, there will be evidence of such a heart change. For some, change will be immediate. Others will take longer. For all of us, having our hearts conformed to God’s desire will be a lifelong journey. Work through the following Bible study to get a deeper understanding of how God sees the heart and how He wants to change it.

1. What is the natural state of our hearts? (Jeremiah 17:9–10; Mark 7:21-22)
2. Are we able to keep the darker aspects of our hearts to ourselves, or does God know our true hearts? (1 Samuel 16:7; Psalm 44:21)
3. Does God want to leave us with deceitful hearts, or does He desire to change our hearts? (Ezekiel 36:25–27; Psalm 51:10; Romans 5:5)

¹ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 47-49.

² 1 Samuel 16:7.

³ Jeremiah 17:9-10.

4. How does God use the Holy Spirit in the process of changing our hearts?

(Ezekiel 11:19; Jeremiah 24:7; Romans 5:5; Proverbs 3:5–6; Galatians 4:6)

5. Read the following verses and write out some of the ways God involves us in the process of heart change.

-Ezekiel 18:30-32; 2 Chronicles 32:25–27

-Psalm 51:10; Psalm 62:8; Psalm 86:11; Psalm 119:36; Psalm 119:145

-Acts 15:9; Romans 10:9–10; Ephesians 3:17; Psalm 51:10

-Mark 12:33; Hebrews 10:16; Psalm 40:8; Psalm 119:2; Psalm 119:10; 1

Corinthians 10:6–10

-Colossians 3:16

6. Review your answers to question 5. See if you found evidence for the following ways that God works in us for heart change. Describe how God has worked in these areas in your life:

-Repentance

-Calling out to God

-Faith

-Obedience

-Gratitude

7. In the process of heart change, God works to strengthen and encourage us.

Read the following passages and write how you see the Holy Spirit sustaining the process of heart change. (1 Thessalonians 3:13; 2 Thessalonians 2:17; Acts 11:23; Acts 14:17)

8. Some of the changes we see as our hearts are being changed might involve the following:

- What we think (Matthew 5:28; Matthew 15:8)
- What we say (Matthew 12:31)
- What we treasure (Matthew 6:21)
- Whether we forgive (Matthew 18:35)
- How we love God and others (Luke 10:27; Matthew 22:37-40; Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18; 1 Peter. 1:22)
- What are some other ways by which evidence would show up in your life?

9. Read Galatians 5. When our hearts are changed by the Holy Spirit, and we cooperate with Him in this change, we will see our thoughts and actions shift from a focus on sinful desires to godly desires. Write out the changes you would like to see in your life through this change. Also write out what your prayer is for the changes you would like to see in your children's lives.

10. Review question 6. Are there any of these key approaches missing in your life? If so, write them down here and pray regularly for God's help to continue the process of changing your heart.

APPENDIX 9¹

TEACHING THE BIBLE TO YOUR CHILDREN (BIBLE STUDY)

The Bible is God’s story that He wants us to know. Understanding how the Bible fits together into one story of God’s plan is important for us individually, but particularly important as we teach the Scripture to our children. Parts of the Bible can seem confusing to children reading on their own, but we can help them understand why Scripture is important, where God’s Word comes from, and how it can be used to help us live our lives.

1. Read 2 Timothy 3:16–17. Where does Scripture come from?
2. Why is it important for you personally to keep in mind that Scriptures are inspired by God?
3. Describe how the Scriptures can be useful in the following areas:
 - Teaching
 - Rebuking
 - Correcting
 - Training
4. How do these uses of Scripture “equip us for every good work?”
5. As parents, how are we to put into practice what we are told to do in Ephesians 6:1–4 and Deuteronomy 6:4–9? Describe some interesting and innovative ways you can teach the Bible to your children.

¹ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 65-66.

6. Read 2 Timothy 3:14–15, the verses preceding those read in question 1. Paul affirms that Timothy was taught the Scriptures from childhood. How might such a lifelong exposure to Scriptures be an asset to one’s Christian life?

7. Read Luke 24:13–35. How does Jesus describe what Moses and the Prophets were writing about?

8. Since Jesus claims that Moses and the Prophets were writing about Himself, how does this change your understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures?

9. In one paragraph, describe the overall story of the Bible.

10. Based on the selections in the *Aslan Academy*, which Bible is age appropriate for your child? Will you commit to spending time reading and discussing the Bible with your child each day?

APPENDIX 10¹

REVIEW OF FUNDAMENTALS

As parents, it is easy to seek immediate behavior modification in our children, but miss out on their long-term discipleship. The key is seeking their heart change, not just an improvement in how they act.

Whether you are a new believer or you've been in church your entire life, we encourage you to review the fundamentals of the Christian faith to prepare you for teaching your children. This section includes articles on reviewing the fundamentals and the critical subject of understanding conversion. It then identifies three basic but thorough guides to give you a strong foundational understanding as you seek to lead your child.

We recommend following the Seven-Step Plan as you work through these resources.

Basic Christianity – John Stott. This classic Christian book is considered by *Christianity Today* as one of the most important books of the past hundred years. The author carefully explains the basics of the Christian faith through sections on Jesus Christ (His claims, character, and resurrection), humanity's need (due to sin), Christ's saving work, and humanity's response to God's call. Stott defends the claims of Christianity and then helps the reader live out that faith in daily life.

Christianity 101 – Gilbert Bilezikian and Bill Hybels. The authors provide a simple, but thorough review of the essentials of Christianity, including an overview of all the main doctrines as well as commentary on various interpretations of each. For new

¹ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 27.

believers, this book can provide a solid grounding in the core truths of the Bible. This book includes discussion questions at the end of each chapter.

The Big Story – How the Bible Makes Sense Out of Life – Justin Buzzard. The author explains the big story of creation, humanity's rebellion, God's plan to rescue us, and the eternal home God has prepared for us. By starting o answering the question of who God is, and who Jesus is, the author lays a solid foundation for understanding the big story. This book is written in a conversational style with lots of stories to highlight each section.

APPENDIX 11¹

UNDERSTANDING AND ENCOURAGING HEART CHANGE

As parents, it is easy to seek immediate behavior modification in our children, but miss out on their long-term discipleship. The key is seeking their heart change, not just an improvement in how they act.

While behavior is certainly important, the real work is to have their heart set on God, with a growing desire to please Him. As one author put it, “once this happens, everything else is just mopping up.” We recommend that parents follow the suggested Seven-Step Plan to fully understand the importance of heart change. Getting this right sets the stage for all growth in the future.

Parenting is Heart Work - Dr. Scott Turansky and Joanne Miller. This book explains how most parents seek behavior modification in their children, but the important thing is to mold a child’s heart for the future. The Bible mentions the word heart more than 750 times, describing it as the center of our being. Once the heart is changed, parents will see not only behavior change; the child’s motivations and focus will be changed as well. The authors give strategies to address a variety of challenges parents face. This book includes a “Reader’s Guide” at the end of the book, which sets forth discussion questions for each chapter.

Shepherding a Child’s Heart - Tedd Tripp. The author focuses on foundational areas for biblical parenting, beginning with the issues of the heart, including influences on the child, Godward orientation, authority, examining goals, discipline and other areas. With a clear emphasis on parents’ recognizing the proper goals of shepherding their

¹ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 41-42.

child, the author provides practical suggestions for accomplishing those goals. The author concludes with advice on shepherding the child through the various stages of childhood.

This book includes application questions at the end of each chapter.

Raising Kids to Love Jesus - H. Norman Wright and Gary J. Oliver. The emphasis on heart change continues in this book. By cultivating understanding and intimacy with children, parents can plant seeds that will grow, shaping their children in a powerful way. The need to know their child is vastly more important than simply shaping their behavior. The purpose of the book is to help parents cultivate a love for the Lord in their children by effectively modeling and communicating their own relationship with Jesus. Parents shouldn't just provide guidelines but be shepherds. The book has a section that focuses on personality types, highlighting how each child is unique, and how parents should adjust based on their children's personality traits.

Gospel-Centered Family - Ed Moll and Tim Chester. The authors explain how God is rightfully in charge and His teachings are good, laying a foundation for respect for God's authority. By respecting God and a child's parents, a basis is formed for a heart change, which the authors describe as much more important than "succeeding" in life. The authors describe how parents need God's grace and His discipline as they seek to discipline their children. Practical advice on administering appropriate discipline is described. The book offers practical guidance on how parents can develop a loving and durable relationship with their children. This book includes Questions for Reflection at the end of each chapter.

APPENDIX 12¹

ISSUES TO PONDER FOR REVIEW OF FUNDAMENTALS

- Before reading either *Christianity 101* or *Basic Christianity*, would you have considered yourself highly knowledgeable, moderately knowledgeable, or not knowledgeable at all when it comes to understanding the core doctrines of Christianity?
 - Where did you get your knowledge of the faith?
 - Does your church do a good job of communicating core doctrines in an effective way? If not, is this something you should discuss with your pastor or another staff member?
 - After reading one of the books in this section, are there still significant questions in your mind regarding the fundamental doctrines and teachings of Christianity? What are they?
 - Can you see how personal selfish desires can lead us to believe what we want to believe rather than what the Bible actually teaches? How might this apply in your situation?
 - Do you have a good understanding of how the Bible fits together as one big story? How would you summarize the Bible to your child?
 - What steps will you take in the near future to begin addressing any significant questions you still have about core doctrines?

¹ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 40.

APPENDIX 13¹

ISSUES TO PONDER FOR HEART CHANGE

- Can you recall a time in your life when you believe that your heart was changed by God?
 - If so, how would you describe that change to your child? What specific things changed in your life?
 - Do you have a friend or member in your church who has been clearly transformed by God? Have you ever asked that person to share his or her story with your family? If not, will you?
 - Do you consider your child a follower of Jesus? Consider your child's conversion story and discuss what changes you may or may not have seen in your child since that event.
 - What areas are you investing heavily (time, money, energy) into your child's development? Sports, education, other activities? How would you prioritize these areas in order of importance in your child's life?
 - How would you describe your family's investment in the spiritual development of your children?

¹ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 50.

APPENDIX 14¹

ISSUES TO PONDER FOR TEACHING THE BIBLE TO YOUR CHILDREN

- Has reading the Bible been much of a priority in your life? If so, when did that begin and why did you become more interested in reading it? If not, will you make it a priority now?
- Has there been someone in your life who really read or taught you the Bible? What about that experience made it interesting?
 - After you read *The Big Story* (found in the Reviewing the Fundamentals section), how did your understanding of the Bible change?
 - Consider how your family is involved in reading the Bible. How would your child respond if asked whether or not reading the Bible is a priority in the family?
 - Consider ways you might make it fun and interesting to read the Bible and discuss various Bible stories as a family.
 - Have you ever used an example from the Bible to illustrate a dilemma or decision that your family has been involved in? How might you do more of this going forward?

¹ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 67.

APPENDIX 15¹

LISTEN AND LEARN ON THEIR OWN (FOR PRESCHOOL THROUGH MIDDLE SCHOOL)

The Chronicles of Narnia Radio theatre - from writings of C.S. Lewis Produced by Focus on the Family, these classic stories from C.S. Lewis are beautifully dramatized by talented actors and compelling music and sound effects. Your child will be enthralled by these recordings, which run more than twenty-two hours (on 19 CDs) in total. Ideal for long car trips or for children to listen on their own. All seven of the Narnia Chronicles are included.

G.T. and the Halo Express. *G.T. and the Halo Express* is a useful tool for building Scripture memory by encouraging children to sing along. Children can repeat along with G.T.

Sir Bernard the Good Knight. In *Sir Bernard the Good Knight*, children can listen to lively music learning about friendship and adventure and twelve chivalric virtues: friendliness, obedience, thrift, courtesy, trustworthiness, kindness, helpfulness, cheerfulness, bravery, loyalty, cleanliness, and reverence. The character of Sir Bernard is based off of Bernard of Clairvaux, an eleventh-century, God-fearing monk.

Adventures in Odyssey. *Adventures in Odyssey* is the classic Focus on the Family children's production that teaches values and faith through adventure and lovable characters.

¹ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 91.

APPENDIX 16¹

DEVELOPING CHARACTER AND FAITH THAT LASTS (ARTICLE)

In our Western society, the daily pressures mount to help our children excel in school, in athletics, in service projects . . . to “build a résumé” that one day will help them get into the right schools, help them land that first job, and get them started on a productive adult life.

With the rise of social media comes increased opportunities for our children (and ourselves) to self-promote and be compared to others. The pressures in these “social spaces” are usually toward presenting only the most appealing version of our “self” to the world.

If we, as parents, are not careful, we become accomplices in setting our children on a path toward an inordinate preoccupation with “the self” and worldly accomplishment. But do we want our children’s “identity” to be built on how they perform or on their identity as a child of God? If we start our children on the wrong path, the world is happy to push them in that direction, reinforcing the belief that accomplishment and promotion is what really matters.

But is this really how we can best prepare our children for their adult years? Wouldn’t you rather have a child whose identity is in Christ, and who grows into an adult that exhibits the “fruit of the spirit?”² When people interact with your child and see love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control, wouldn’t you feel that your child is ready to find his or her way in the world?

¹ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 53-55.

² Galatians 5:22-23.

The Holy Spirit brings the fruit into our lives, but as parents we can help our children's hearts be attuned to the Spirit as we focus on character formation. As parents, we need to help our children develop the inner qualities that will serve as a foundation as they mature into honorable and godly adults.

If our children develop an honorable and godly character, they will be prepared to face adversity with perseverance; selfishness or rudeness with kindness. When they are attacked in some way, they will be able to restrain their reaction with self-control. At school, in the neighborhood, in group activities, they will become an instrument of God's kingdom at work.

Shaping our children's character is not a check-the-box process. It is an ongoing effort to truly understand the child, discover areas of great potential and concern, and then provide guidance through activities that help mold that character into what God desires.

Each child is different; as parents we need to help each child develop God-given gifts and skills, while helping the child turn away from areas that run counter to God's desires.

In this section of the *Aslan Academy*, you will learn about developing character in the following areas:

- Integrity
- A teachable spirit
- Self-discipline
- Compassion
- A servant's heart
- Courage
- Faith

- Joy

Helping to shape your child’s character is a critical part of your child’s continued spiritual growth. This section of the *Aslan Academy* builds on the excellent work by John and Susan Yates, as described in their book *Character Matters! Raising Kids with Character at Lasts*.

A significant percentage of children raised in church-going homes drift away from faith as they go from high school through the college years. Simply sharing biblical knowledge and “dragging them to church” won’t necessarily instill in them a strong yearning to know God and to follow Him as they become independent young adults. But if children, being led by their parents, have the chance to fully understand the important elements of a godly character and what it means to live an honorable and godly life, they will be more prepared to enter the pressure-cooker world and be able to maintain their faith in Jesus Christ.

A recent study was conducted on Christian students transitioning to college, seeking to understand the most important influences on shaping their faith.³ From choices of friends inside their youth group, friends outside of their youth group, youth leaders, parents, and adults in their congregation, the students chose parents as the number one influence. In fact, as pointed out in the *Aslan Academy* resource *Sticky Faith*, one study concluded that the most important influence in shaping the spiritual life of a child is the spiritual life modeled and taught by his or her parents.⁴ So character formation is not just for the children. As you as a parent go through these resources and seek to build a godly

³ Dr. Kara E. Powell and Dr. Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 19–23.

⁴ Christian Smith with Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 56.

character in your children, examine yourself and seek God's guidance for your own ongoing character development.

This section builds on the earlier discussion of "heart change." As a child's heart begins to change, the child will become more interested in becoming the person God wants him or her to be. Without heart change, children may learn to "follow the rules" or have decency and manners, but they will miss the big picture of God developing them into the individuals He wants them to be. As parents, focusing on character, rather than selfish promotion and worldly accomplishment, will give children the best opportunity to fulfill God's plan for them. Then, in whatever setting, they will be effective and godly models, maybe even leaders, exhibiting a godly character for others.

APPENDIX 17¹

DEVELOPING CHARACTER AND FAITH THAT LASTS (BIBLE STUDY)

There is a big difference between helping our children be happy and helping them have a godly character that will sustain them through the good and bad periods of life. The foundational elements of character development—integrity, a teachable spirit, self-discipline, compassion, a servant’s heart, courage, faith, and joy—take hard work and intentionality on the part of parents. If we neglect character development, much of our other work as parents will easily fall apart as our child leaves our home. As with heart change, the Holy Spirit does the work of change, but as parents we can prepare our children for when the Holy Spirit does His work.

Character development is integrally connected with heart change. Consider character development as the “living out” of heart change in every aspect of one’s life. With a godly character, based on biblical teaching, we can weather the inevitable storms and flourish no matter our circumstances. As parents, one of the best gifts we can give our children is to properly prepare them for when they are on their own. Teaching and training them in character development is perhaps our most important job.

As you address the questions below, see how God prepares people in each area and how God wants to prepare you and your child’s character.

1. Integrity. Read Colossians 3:1–7. If we are raised with Christ, what are we to set our hearts on?
2. Read verse 5. Why do you think God wants us to “put to death” our earthly nature?

¹ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 57-59.

3. A Teachable Spirit. Read Psalm 25:4–15. In verses 8–10, why should we trust God’s teaching?

4. How do you think forgiveness allows us to be guided by God’s teaching?

5. Self-Discipline. Read Luke 9:23 and 2 Timothy 1:7. How does the concept of denying yourself lead to a stronger character? Why is Jesus such a strong example for us?

6. In 2 Timothy, Paul writes about God’s help for us in self-discipline. Why is it essential to have the Holy Spirit give us power to discipline ourselves?

7. Compassion. Read Isaiah 58:6–11. Why do you think God describes those with compassion as a “well watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail” (v. 11)? How does being compassionate not only help others but change ourselves?

8. Read Psalm 103:6–14. In your own words, describe God’s compassion toward us based on these verses.

9. A Servant’s Heart. Read Philippians 2:3–4 and John 13:1–17. Why does God call us to value others more than ourselves?

10. If Jesus can model service as He did in the passage in John, what types of actions could we model in our life that would demonstrate humility and love for others?

11. Courage. Read Deuteronomy 31:6. Why should we not be afraid?

12. Read Ephesians 2:10. If God is with you, and we are created in Christ Jesus to do the work God has already prepared for us, what should our attitude be as we go about this work? How can we expect God to help us carry out His plan for us?

13. Faith. Read Psalm 111. Write five reasons why we should be able to trust God and have faith in Him.

14. Read Ephesians 1:17–21. Describe the power that God describes He will give us as we put our faith and hope in Him.

15. Joy. Read John 15:1–13. How do you think the “pruning” process can lead to joy? Describe an experience in your life where this has happened to you.

16. Read Psalm 97. Contemplate God’s awesome power as described in this psalm. How can God’s power and glory help us have joy in our everyday lives?

The elements covered in this Bible study are based on those identified in the book *Character Matters! Raising Kids with Character at Lasts*, by John Yates and Susan Alexander Yates, one of the resources in the *Aslan Academy* program.

APPENDIX 18¹

ISSUES TO PONDER FOR DEVELOPING CHARACTER AND FAITH THAT LASTS

- Think of the key people in your life who have influenced your character the most. Have you ever told your children about these people and how they made an impact on you? If not, why not do so?
- Think of your children's closest friends. How would you describe the character of those friends?
- Would you describe your child as mostly influencing his or her friends or being influenced by them? Are you taking any steps to help your child be a better influence?
- How has your parenting approach focused on character building so far? Are there other areas that are taking time away from opportunities to build character? If so, what are they?
- Based on your estimate of your child's faith, is it likely or unlikely that their faith will stand up to the pressures of high school or college? Think of situations or experiences that might give you insight into the depth of your child's faith.
- How would you describe your child's youth group at church? Is the group helping to equip children with a deep faith, or does it seem to be more focused on entertaining them? Have you ever discussed this with your church's youth director?

¹ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 60.

APPENDIX 19¹

INTRODUCING SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES TO YOUR CHILDREN (ARTICLE)

What are spiritual disciplines? It's not a phrase we commonly hear today, even at church.

Spiritual disciplines are very straightforward, practical steps toward developing a Christian character and a deeper relationship with God.

Most of us have heard of several of them—prayer, worship, service, fasting, celebration—although we may not have seen how they are all connected.

Why do we need these spiritual disciplines? Once we have been saved through Christ, why do we need to do things to discipline our spiritual nature? Well, even though we are redeemed, we are also fallen. Our corrupted human natures constantly fight against our renewed spiritual nature, so we must make it strong, putting on “the whole armor of God.”² Furthermore, as C.S. Lewis frequently pointed out, humans are material as well as spiritual beings. What we believe must be expressed in action, or we will soon lose those beliefs. Maria von Trapp, whose family became famous through the musical *The Sound of Music*, put it this way in her autobiography: “as long as we live here on earth, we simply are not pure spirits, but we also have . . . a very human heart, and that heart needs outward signs of its inward affections.”³

And it is actually more effective to teach kids about Jesus through spiritual disciplines than it is to try to get them to “feel” converted. We learn truths as children through traditions and habitual practices that we come to identify with what is important

¹ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 71-73.

² Ephesians 6:13.

³ Maria Augusta Trapp, *The Story of the Trapp Family Singers* (1949; repr. New York: Image/Doubleday, 1990), 73.

in life. Learning and practicing spiritual disciplines will help children to ground their faith more firmly and live it out intelligently and with purpose.

It is essential to teach children spiritual disciplines before they go out into the world and find themselves in situations where their faith will be tested. They cannot be expected to exercise righteous judgment in the world unless they have previously learned and assimilated the virtues that will enable them to make the right decisions when faced with an attack on their faith.

Below is a brief description of twelve spiritual disciplines and brief guidance for incorporating their practice into your children's lives.

Meditation on the Word of God is an essential foundation for forming godly character in your children. When you read the Bible with your children, spend time discussing what you have read. The article on "Teaching the Bible to Children" in the *Aslan Academy* Guide adds more detail on this cornerstone of our faith.

Prayer is probably the first spiritual discipline most Christian parents teach their kids. Even so, it is important to make prayer a meaningful part of life for our children. One of the best ways to help your children understand the importance of prayer is to ask them to pray for you, about issues that concern your family or the world. This will help children to understand that prayer is one of the most wonderful ways through which God enables us to take part in caring for His Creation; that when we pray, we are actually participating in addressing the concerns we are bringing to God to solve.

Fasting is a spiritual discipline less often undertaken today. However, fasting is an important way to prepare ourselves to depend on God rather than material objects for security, which will then enable us to resist more seductive temptations. Fasting from

meat, in the early church, would have been a direct stand against the wasteful extravagance of Roman banqueting. Today, perhaps it is better to fast from the junk or “comfort foods” we turn to instead of God, or from the information devices that take up our time—time that might otherwise be dedicated to Him.

Study is different from meditation in that it is more active. Meditating on the Word begins to instill a godly character and a natural bent toward and desire for making godly decisions. But it is also necessary to learn how to apply these Christian principles in the situations of daily life. The more we study the Bible, and how the church has applied its teachings throughout the centuries, the better we and our children are equipped to carry them out today.

Simplicity is all about giving and humility. C.S. Lewis pointed out that the desire for more “luxuries [than] any man can really enjoy”⁴ is rooted in pride and enmity, exhibiting the desire to be better than others. Demanding more than we need is a sin deeply rooted in our fallen nature. We are called to set our children the example of generosity, teaching them “it is more blessed to give than to receive.”⁵

Solitude is time alone with God—an addition to prayer. Encourage your children to take the time each day to silently notice and appreciate God’s goodness—outside, looking at His creation, is often the best way. Learning to “be still and know,”⁶ in awe of God’s greatness, is the beginning of reverence and obedience to His will.

Submission is this obedience to God’s will. But God has created the parent-child relationship to teach obedience to Him through learning obedience to parents. Our modern society pushes the idea of self-realization. But this rebellious attempt to “make

⁴ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1952: repr. London: HarperCollins, 2002), 123.

⁵ Acts 20:35, NIV.

⁶ Psalm 46:10.

our own decisions,” ironically leads to slavery to social fads and sinful impulses. Only God knows what is truly best for us, and obedience to Him and His chosen ministers for our care is the only way to be truly free. Don’t feel guilty about imposing Christian rules of behavior on your children; if you don’t teach them God’s ways, the world will force its ways on them.

Service is putting into practice the two greatest commandments: love God and love your neighbor. Give your children opportunities to serve others. Operation Christmas Child is a wonderful way to start. Teach them that doing God’s work and helping others comes first, before taking care of their own personal goals—and that even their talents are God’s gifts to be used for serving others, not our own glory. When you ask your children to help out, remind them that this is an opportunity to be a “good and faithful servant,”⁷ the highest commendation that can be given us by God.

Confession of our sins is not a one-time conversion event. It is connected with our remembrance of Christ’s sacrifice for us; the more often we confess our sins, the more closely we are drawn into the renewal of our lives through His death and resurrection. It is best to have our children ask for forgiveness from God, as well as the people they have hurt, every time they misbehave, and talk to them afterward about the joy of being forgiven.

Worship is honoring God for His greatness. It is easiest to start with gratitude, perhaps by making a list of all you and your children have to be thankful for. Praise and reverence, reminders of His sovereignty, are connected to our joyful confidence of intimate communion with Him. God is King as well as Father, and our worship should

⁷ Matthew 25:21.

contain awe as well as trust. *The Chronicles of Narnia*, with their depiction of Aslan, teach this very well.

Guidance is dependence on God, rather than ourselves, to make the right decisions. It is active faith; when we—and our children—follow God’s guidance in His Word, we demonstrate our trust in Him.

Celebration! This last spiritual discipline underscores all the others. Being a follower of Jesus is fun; it is a life of joy. Even times of hardship can become times of celebration, if we seek to understand how God works through those difficult in order to shape us. And every celebratory achievement in our lives, even those not directly connected with worship, can and should be to us opportunities for thanking God for His blessing.

As your children learn that these spiritual disciplines were intended by God for us to rejoice in and grow closer to Him, they will begin to astonish you with their joy and zeal.

APPENDIX 20¹

INTRODUCING SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES TO YOUR CHILDREN (BIBLE STUDY)

Having quiet time alone with God is a difficult exercise for many people. For others, it is the time of day when they joyfully come before the creator of the universe and have fellowship with Him. Jesus needed time alone with the Father. We are commanded to do the same.

In today's world, distractions come at us at a feverish pace. Unless we are intentional about time with God, time in the Scripture, worship, celebration and other disciplines, the world will gladly fill our time with urgent, but less-important tasks. As parents, we should not only refocus on these disciplines ourselves, but also begin cultivating these habits in our children. When these habits start early, they will prepare children to continue them as they grow older. That said, these disciplines are outlined to grow your child's relationship with Jesus, not simply to be done legalistically. As parents in an age-appropriate manner support their child's heart change and encourage a godly character, these disciplines can be a part of that development.

The following study questions are designed to give you a small taste of why spiritual disciplines are important. Parents should follow the Seven Step Plan to learn more about applying these disciplines.

1. Meditation. Read 2 Timothy 2:7. Why do you think it is important to “think” or meditate over all that God says?

¹ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 75-78.

2. In this verse, God says He will “give you understanding in all things.” How does “thinking” also include listening to God’s voice?

3. Prayer. Read Matthew 6:5–13 and Romans 8:26. From these passages, how would you describe the importance of prayer?

4. How is the Holy Spirit involved in our prayers?

5. Study. Read Romans 12:2. What is the purpose of studying and learning the will of God?

6. How can the exercise of our mind be used by God in transforming us?

7. Fasting. Why do you think depriving oneself of food, a pleasurable activity, or a habit would cause you to focus more on God?

8. Read Acts 13:2–3 and Acts 14:23. Luke describes prayer, worship, and fasting. How would you describe how these three things work together?

9. Simplicity. Read Luke 12:15 and Matthew 6:19-21,24. How would avoiding greed and not storing up treasures on earth help someone lead a simpler lifestyle?

10. What are some of the pitfalls one would avoid by living a simpler and more modest lifestyle? What are some advantages to this type of life- style?

11. Solitude. Read Psalm 62:5–8 and Psalm 46:10–11. The author talks about “finding rest” and says to “be still” before God. How can being quiet before God lead to greater understanding of His goodness, His faithfulness, and His trustworthiness?

12. Submission. Read James 4:1–10 and Ephesians 5:21–33. Why do you think God wants us to have a humble spirit? Why is He calling us to submit to Him and to each other?

13. If you are married, how are you modeling God's command to love and to submit to and respect one another? How would you describe your children's willingness to submit—to God or to their parents?

14. Service. Read 1 Peter 4:8–10 and James 2:14–26. How does God use grace to prepare us for service? How would you describe how grace and service can work together to help us grow in maturity?

15. Confession. Read 1 John 1:8–9. If we claim we have no sin, what does the author say we are doing and what state would we be in?

16. What is the connection between confession and forgiveness?

17. Worship. Read Revelation 4:6–11. Name some additional reasons—why you see God as being worthy of worship.

18. Guidance. Read Psalm 139:23–24 and John 16:13. In Psalm 139, David is asking for God to search him and lead him. Why? In John 16:13, through what power does God promise to guide you?

19. Celebrate. Read Exodus 23:14–17 and Luke 15:32. Why do you think God was calling His people to celebrate three times each year? Why was the father celebrating the return of his lost son?

20. Read Psalm 35:27 and John 10:10. How can celebrating lead us to have joy in God and to have joy in the life God has given us?

APPENDIX 21¹

HELPING CHILDREN UNDERSTAND AND EXPLAIN THEIR FAITH (ARTICLE)

Many believers, especially those who are young, can relate to this experience of a recent college graduate: I clearly remember the day, during my first semester in college, when I first fully realized how important it is to have learned how to defend your faith as a young person. I was sitting in my Latin class, right before my professor arrived, listening with unbelieving ears to the easy, light-hearted manner in which my fellow classmates—intelligent, cultured young people, most of whom I liked very much—were discussing, and actually laughing about, issues whose sinfulness I had up to that moment sincerely believed no one could underestimate. All at once I realized how different the culture of the world is from the core beliefs of the Christian faith, and how much intelligent effort is necessary in order to explain to others, not only what is truth,² but why the truth matters.

Why does it matter? Being able to defend and explain the Truth of our faith to others is an essential part of our mission to share the gospel with all nations and all cultures. When a person’s perspective on life is completely contrary to the Word of God, that person will not understand why he or she needs the gospel, until it is explained to them and his or her own perspective is challenged. Prepare how you will teach and model God’s Word and His commands to your children.

First Peter 3:15 reads: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and

¹ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 83-84.

² John 18:38.

respect” (NIV). This is the chief reason why we, as followers of Jesus, must be able, and train our children to be able, to give a defense for our faith: God has commanded us to do so, but we are to do it with gentleness and respect.

Apologetics, this “giving an answer for your faith,” is a part of mission that has been greatly neglected in recent generations. It is easy to see why. Many people are afraid they will not be “smart” enough to undertake properly this great responsibility, forgetting that God’s grace is as sufficient for this as for any other task. But in recent years things have become even more challenging. Up until recently, Western culture has been predominantly Christian in its norms and customs. Few felt it necessary to explain why Christianity was the best route to follow. Even the most unchristian members of society knew they had to behave in accordance with at least a superficially Christian moral and philosophical code, even if no one could explain what the reasons were that such moral and religious standards were demanded.

But this has changed. Step into any university across the United States—and indeed Canada and Europe as well—and you will find young people, not unreasonably, refusing to associate themselves with a faith that they do not understand and do not see many people around them purposefully living out. New religions and atheistic philosophies have replaced our nominally Christian culture with a religiously pluralistic culture, and young people see no reason why the faith of their parents and grandparents should be considered more valuable or true than any other.

And this is not happening only on college campuses. In high school and even before, kids are bombarded with questions about and challenges to their faith, whether from friends or through topics raised in our media culture. At such a young age, they

cannot be expected to respond from experience; believing adults may well be able to argue against non-Christian worldviews because they tried them previously and found them failures. Children lack the moral experiences of adults.

However, when it comes to the fundamental questions of reality, children often have a deeper insight than adults. With fewer life complications and responsibilities than adults, young people are more focused on “big picture” issues, trying to figure out what it’s all about take on the distractions of career, serious relationships, and the business of running their own lives and households. They are the ones who are asking the most tricky questions about faith, the ones who most deeply demand an answer.

But how do we teach children how to explain their faith and defend their beliefs when challenged? First of all, it is necessary to recognize that the questions children ask are important; they need an intelligent response. If you as a parent don’t have a good answer, say so, but then follow up and do some research. Take time to discuss matters of faith with them. If you demonstrate that you think following Jesus is worth exploring, they will follow your lead in an astonishing way. Children tend to give their all, with fewer culturally induced inhibitions or embarrassment than adults have, to any effort they think is significant in their lives. If they feel that way about their faith, they will likely have a great influence on their friends and classmates and continue to have an influence in God’s kingdom work.

APPENDIX 22¹

UNDERSTANDING AND EXPLAINING YOUR FAITH (BIBLE STUDY)

As followers of Jesus, we are commanded to share our faith with others.

However, most church-goers are reluctant to do so. Part of that reluctance is that most believers are not prepared—they have not studied or planned—to be able to give an answer for why they believe.

The Bible not only commands us to share our faith, but it also gives us wonderful guidance on how to do so. Through the Bible study below and the other *Aslan Academy* resources in this section, you and your children can be prepared to share faith in a winsome, joy-filled way. Follow the Seven-Step Plan for using these resources in an effective way. With the cultural backdrop of today’s world, it is more important than ever for believers to give an answer for their hope.

1. Read 1 Peter 3:15. What do you think it means to “be prepared to give an answer” for the hope you have?
2. In what way are we to give our answer?
3. Read John 3:16–19. When describing your faith in Jesus, how can this passage be an encouragement to nonbelievers? In verse 19, how does this explain how some people are not interested in hearing about Jesus?
4. Read Matthew 28:18–20. What does Jesus mean by “making disciples”? Does this seem broader to you than simply seeking “conversions”?
5. Read Colossians 3:12–14. What should our attitude and actions be toward those with whom we are discussing our faith?

¹ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 85-86.

6. In verse 14, what is the most important thing we must have as we live out our faith?

7. Think of the people with whom you regularly come into contact. What are some cultural barriers or difficulties you could expect if you have a conversation about faith?

8. List some possible ways you can prepare to overcome these difficulties. Are there questions you could ask that would lead you into an opportunity for a deeper discussion?

9. Prepare a three-minute and a five-minute explanation of how you came to a saving faith in Jesus. Commit to be prepared to share that testimony when the opportunity arises. A simple outline to consider is “I was once [fill in the blank], but Jesus changed me by [explain].”

10. Using the *Aslan Academy* resources, will you commit to practicing situations with your children so they can be comfortable sharing their faith with their friends?

APPENDIX 23¹

HELPING CHILDREN UNDERSTAND AND EXPLAIN THEIR FAITH

Studies show that a significant percentage of children walk away from their faith when challenged in high school, college, or in some other arena. The vast majority of these children never had a solid understanding of their faith or knew how to explain what they believe. They may have never felt comfortable asking difficult questions, or perhaps they couldn't handle the peer pressure. It is our job as parents to help ground our children's faith, provide a comfortable environment to handle doubts and questions, and help children make their faith real and substantial, able to stand up to the challenges ahead. Follow the Seven-Step Plan to use the following resources, broken down by age group.

Big Truths for Little Kids - Susan Hunt and Richie Hunt (preschoolers). The authors use catechism to pose questions and provide answers to teach the essentials of biblical knowledge. The overall goal of the book, in the words of the authors, is to (1) Teach children that they are created for God's glory, (2) Show the practical implications of this life purpose, and (3) Repeatedly emphasize to children their need for God's grace to glorify Him. The book has stories that go along with each section of the catechism. Children are expected to regularly memorize sections of the catechism with the long-term goal of memorizing them all. They will then be a guide for that child throughout life. The catechism covers the nature and character of God, the fall, the promise to Abraham, the Ten Commandments, the Lord's Prayer, and so forth.

¹ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 81-82.

The Awesome Book of Bible Answers for Kids - Josh McDowell and Kevin Johnson (elementary grades). Ideal for children through sixth grade, this book provides simple but clear answers to the questions most elementary schoolchildren have about the Bible. Broken down into helpful sections, the authors tackle questions about God, sin, forgiveness, God's love, prayer, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Devil, the Bible, different religions, right and wrong, the future, the church, death, and heaven. The authors also include a short conversation guide for parents as they discuss each of these questions.

If I Could Ask God Anything: Awesome Bible Answers for Curious Kids- Kathryn Slattery (middle schoolers). This book is organized into sections on God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the Bible, Christianity, prayer, the church, Christian holidays, being a Christian, and "big questions." Focusing mostly on the core truths of the Bible, this guide provides an excellent foundation to help middle-schoolers understand truth and to grow in their faith.

The Questions Christians Hope No One Will Ask - Mark Mittenberg (for teens). This book by Mark Mittenberg (co-author with Lee Strobel of the Case for Christ series) takes on the major obstacles to belief, helping the reader properly prepare to discuss these issues. Key topics include the nature and existence of God, evolution, can the Bible be trusted, was Jesus just a man or God, evil and suffering, abortion, homosexuality, hypocritical Christians, and heaven and hell. The author provides solid answers and clear context for the answers, done in a loving and winsome manner to prepare teens to effectively engage their friends and others on difficult issues.

Apologetics Study Bible for Students - Sean McDowell, editor (for teenagers, college students, and young adults). Studying the Bible can be difficult for anyone,

particularly young people. The Apologetics Study Bible for Students provides helpful introductions to each book, extensive commentaries on key biblical passages and thoughtful answers to the tough questions young people are asking today. Additional features include “challenges and tactics” for addressing challenging questions, archeological facts to buttress the historicity of the Bible, and inspiring personal stories of individuals defending and living out and their faith. A wide range of effective and credible writers have been gathered to write the extensive features accompanying the Scripture.

How to Stay Christian in College - J. Budziszewski (for high school students anticipating going to college, college students, and parents of high school/college students). The author, a professor of government and philosophy at the University of Texas, understands from experience that from the moment students set foot on the contemporary college campus, their Christian convictions and discipline are assaulted. The goal of the book is to prepare, equip, and encourage Christian students planning to go to college, and ones already there, to meet the spiritual challenges of college, and to help parents understand what their children are going through so they can offer more effective spiritual support. The book guides readers through the maze of campus realities, discusses the foundations of the Christian faith, and directly addresses the different worldviews and myths that students encounter at college.

APPENDIX 24¹

ISSUES TO PONDER FOR HELPING CHILDREN UNDERSTAND AND EXPLAIN THEIR FAITH

- If someone asked you to explain what you believe about God, how comfortable and clear could you be in answering them?
- Have you ever asked your child to describe what they believe and why?
- How would your child react if a teacher or another student ridiculed his or her faith? Would your child be prepared to give a clear response?
- Has there been someone in your family or a close friend who has stepped away from his or her faith because of something bad happening? What are the misconceptions about faith that would cause someone to blame God when trials come?
- In conjunction with one of the resources recommended above, ask your child how he or she would answer questions that others might ask about his or her faith.

¹ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 87.

APPENDIX 25¹

IS MY CHILD A FOLLOWER OF JESUS? BY JOEL S. WOODRUFF, ED.D.

Christian parents have one ultimate desire for their children—that they place their faith in Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior.

However, what does the conversion of a child look like?

In The *Chronicles of Narnia* book *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, C.S. Lewis illustrates what the true conversion of a child looks like. He begins by describing the preconversion life of a boy. He writes,

There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it . . . I can't tell you how his friends spoke to him, for he had none . . . Eustace Clarence liked animals, especially beetles, if they were dead and pinned to a card . . . [He] disliked his cousins . . . But he was quite glad when he heard that Edmund and Lucy were coming to stay. For deep down inside him he liked bossing and bullying . . . he knew that there are dozens of ways to give people a bad time if you are in your own home and they are only visitors.²

This is the picture of a child who doesn't know Jesus. Later in the story, Eustace falls into a dragon's cave with horrifying results. Lewis writes, "[Eustace] had turned into a dragon while he was asleep. Sleeping on a dragon's hoard with greedy, dragonish thoughts in his heart, he had become a dragon himself . . . He realized that he was a monster . . . He began to wonder if he himself had been such a nice person as he had always supposed."³

This is the point at which Eustace becomes aware that he is a sinful person, which of course is the first step in the conversion process. A child must recognize and admit that he or she is a sinner.

¹ C.S. Lewis Institute, *Aslan Academy Parents Guidebook* (Springfield, VA: C.S. Lewis Institute, 2014), 31-34.

² C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952: repr., New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 3-4.

³ Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 91-92.

Fortunately for Eustace, he soon meets the lion Aslan (the Christ figure in Narnia). Eustace allows Aslan to “un-dragon” him by peeling off his dragon skin. Eustace describes the scene, “The very first tear he made was so deep that I thought it had gone right into my heart,”⁴ which of course it had. Eustace’s heart has been changed by Aslan, and he is baptized in a pool of water and comes out a changed boy. In other words, the child has repented and confessed his sin, surrendered to Jesus, and the Lord has changed his heart and made him His child.

Lewis then gives us a realistic description of the post-conversion life of a child. He writes of Eustace, “It would be nice, and fairly nearly true, to say that “from that time forth Eustace was a different boy.” To be strictly accurate, he began to be a different boy. He had relapses. There were still many days when he could be very tiresome. But most of those I shall not notice. The cure had begun.”⁵

In other words, while the child wasn’t perfect, there was a marked change in his life now that he had allowed Aslan to “un-dragon” him.

While this illustration can give us an idea about what conversion looks like in a child, how can we know whether or not our child is a Christian?

Fortunately, Jesus gives us some principles to follow in discerning the spiritual state of another person. First, He warns that we must be careful when judging another person; we must hold ourselves to the same standards of holiness with which we critique others.⁶ In other words, whether we’re trying to discern the conversion of our child or someone else, we must apply the same basic criteria to ourselves.

⁴ Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 109.

⁵ Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 112.

⁶ Matthew 7:1-5.

Second, Jesus says that it is possible to discern the spiritual vitality of another person by the “fruit” they produce in their lives. Those who are rooted in Jesus will produce good and healthy “fruit.” Those who have not experienced the spiritual healing that only Jesus can give will bear “thorns and thistles.”⁷ Paul later elaborates on this idea when he says that the follower of Jesus will exhibit the fruit of the Spirit in growing measure: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. In contrast, the nonbeliever will continue to produce the fruit of the sinful nature: hatred, discord, jealousy, sexual immorality, anger, and lying, to name a few examples.⁸ In other words, our actions are evidence of whether or not our hearts and minds have been transformed by the work of the Holy Spirit. This doesn’t mean that Christians will live sinless lives, or that non-Christians will always appear to be bad people. However, there will be a noticeable qualitative difference in the way the Christian lives following true conversion.

Third, Jesus makes it clear that salvation isn’t just intellectual assent, merely confessing that Jesus is Lord. He says that on Judgment Day, many will say, “Lord, Lord,” and Jesus will say, “I never knew you.”⁹ Authentic faith in Christ involves a heart that truly believes¹⁰ and is evidenced by changes in thought, word, and deed. So, while the profession of faith, kneeling by a bedside, or responding to an altar call at church is important, it must be accompanied by a transformation of the heart seen in daily life. What, then, are some reliable signs that someone has experienced true conversion? The great American preacher and theologian of the early eighteenth century, Jonathan

⁷ Matthew 7:15-20, John 15:4-6.

⁸ Galatians 5:16-25.

⁹ Matthew 7:21-23.

¹⁰ Romans 10:9.

Edwards, who preached in some of the revivals of the First Great Awakening, examined this question. In his work *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God*, he found in 1 John 4 that the apostle points out five traits of an authentically converted believer. In modern language, such a person:

1. Acknowledges and exalts Jesus as Lord and Savior.¹¹
2. Recognizes the evil of sin in his or her life, the world, and the devil and seeks to overcome it.¹²
3. Has a growing understanding and love for God's Word.¹³
4. Seeks for and discerns the truth in all things.¹⁴
5. Loves God and others.¹⁵

These five marks of true conversion will be present in the life of every true believer, although the marks may evidence themselves somewhat differently in the life of a child compared to an adult. (Immaturity and stages of development must be taken into account.) So how do these translate into the life of your son or daughter? Here are some questions to consider:

1. Is there a genuine affection and love for Jesus in your child's life, or is your child just parroting your religious language? In other words, is your child in love with Jesus as evidenced by an infectious enthusiasm for the Lord? Does your child enjoy talking about Jesus and demonstrate sincerity in the worship of Jesus as seen in prayers and corporate worship?

¹¹ 1 John 4:2-3.

¹² 1 John 4:4-5.

¹³ 1 John 4:6.

¹⁴ 1 John 4:6.

¹⁵ 1 John 4:8.

2. Is your child truly sorry when he or she does something sinful or harms someone else? Does he or she get upset when bad things happen to others and have a desire to do something about it? Is your child's conscience working in a way that leads to repentance—a change in actions and desire to live like Jesus?

3. Does your child enjoy reading Bible stories, and is he or she growing in the understanding of Scripture? Does your child seem interested in knowing more about God and does he or she ask appropriate questions?

4. Is your child growing in wisdom and is he or she better able to discern good from evil as evidenced by what he or she enjoys doing and choosing? For instance, does a child turn away from media choices that are offensive, recognize and make comments about the bad behavior of adults or peers, stand up for a friend being bullied, and confront or walk away from negative peer pressure?

5. Is your child growing in kindness toward friends and siblings and demonstrating greater obedience toward you as a parent? Is your child respectful toward adults? Does your child play well together with other children—doing kind and thoughtful things for others without being asked?

While the discernment of true conversion isn't an exact science, since only God knows the true state of the human heart, I trust these questions can help you recognize the presence of God's grace in your child. Always keep praying for your child and know that God hears your prayer.

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